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CBW

Coach and Bus Week

The PSV industry's news weekly Issue 297 27 November 1997

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EDITORIAL

MOT latest in seatbelt saga

IT IS plain from the healthy CBW post-bag this week that the vast majority of operators are disgusted by the seatbelt debacle - not just the recent idea to add them to the MOT, but the entire catalogue of disaster.



As you will read in this issue, the industry's message to the Department of Transport, now DETR, has been consistent for seven years; fitting seatbelts to vehicles not designed to have them is fraught with problems, and is unlikely to significantly improve the passenger safety of an industry with an enviable record.

The same message has been spelt out by the DoT itself and by safety organisations. Determined to be populist, two successive Governments have pressed ahead with all the co-ordination of a circus clown. The result is a set of rules which is confused and confusing, the waters being muddled every time the DETR dips its toe in.

Marksman highlighted last week that the legislative swamp in which the DETR has mired itself now makes it unclear whether foreign, visiting operators will need seatbelts when carrying school children. In a letter sent to BUSK and forwarded to CBW, the DETR admits in as many words that, until tested in court, it too, is unsure. At present, it is placing its own interpretation on the matter. This industry deserves better.

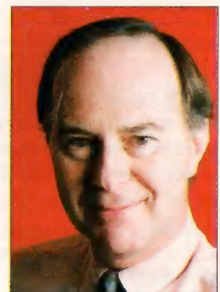
Take care when buying

WITH MEMORIES of the Coach & Bus 97 show still vivid, manufacturers and dealers are keen to keep the momentum rolling.

Having invested time and money in the special preparation of the show exhibits, a popular tactic is to take this year's star products out to the people in the form of a roadshow.

As the UK coach and bus registration figures climbed out of the doldrums and the exchange rate moved sharply in favour of imports, so mainstream manufacturers on mainland Europe spotted their opportunity. The only cloud on the horizon seems to be uncertainty about the way things will pan out in 1998. However, it is certain that operators are faced with more choice than ever before.

Consequently, ride and drive notwithstanding, operators must be particularly canny about any buying decisions they make. While it will take a crystal ball to look ahead five, 10, 15, or 20 years, the important issues are the manufacturer's support and how well a new coach or bus will perform, long term.



MIKE MORGAN, Editor

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events

2 December: Alternative Fuels - Real World seminar, Millbrook Proving Ground, Bedford. Cost £195 plus VAT, from 0181 743 4224, fax 0181 743 3133

3 December: The Future Role of the Traffic Commissioner, by Chris Heaps, traffic commissioner for the Western Area. Chartered Institute of Transport Gatwick Area Section Meeting, Conference Room 3, Sir Winston Churchill Suite, South Terminal, Gatwick Airport, 1830 hrs for 1900 hrs. More details from Alec Horner, fax 01273 582404

11 December: Buses Worldwide meeting, Fred Talant Hall, London NW1. Details from Hon Sec, 3 Cypress Drive, Fleet, Hants, GU13 9HE

16-22 January 1998: 15th Geneva Commercial Vehicle Show. Details on 00 41 22 761 11 11, fax 00 41 22 798 0100

23 January 1998: CBW's Coach Industry Awards, Metropole Hotel, NEC. Details from Kate Dalton, Eventon, 5 Fenlake Business Park, Fengate, Peterborough PE1 5QB, tel 01733 311599, fax 01733 343310

5 February: CPT Annual Dinner, Grosvenor House, London W1

11-13 February: Third UITP conference on automatic fare collection, Bologna, Italy. Contact UITP, 00 32 2673 6100, fax 00 32 2660 1072, e-mail events@uitp.com

17-19 February: Integrated Communications 98, the ISDN and ATM Exhibition, Olympia 2, level 2, London. Details from Martin Scott on 01895 454438, fax 01895 454588

17-19 February: Smartcard 98, Olympia 2, London. Details from Debby Cummins, on 01895 454534, fax 01895 454588

25-26 April: Brighton Coach Rally, Madeira Drive, Brighton. Trade stand inquiries, 01926 888123, fax 01926 888004, dinner and rally entries, 0181 581 0049, fax 0181 581 0243



Flights heading north for new operator acquisition

Third biggest coach operator Flights buys

By Mark Williams

THIRD biggest coach operator in the UK, Flights of Birmingham, has reinforced its position by buying Travel West Midlands' Central Coachways operation, and is now looking for another acquisition.

The 17-vehicle fleet of coaches and their existing staff transfer to Flights' Long Acre depot, together with all goodwill and existing bookings and contracts.

The fleet of Central Coachways, which trades as Central Liner, is to be steadily replaced with new and late vehicles. At present, it consists of Bovas, Ikarus Volvos, and Van Hool DAFs.

The acquisition comes three years after Flights made

its first approach to TWM: "The opportunity came when TWM decided to dispose of non-core business," said group md Geoff Flight.

Flights says it plans to develop Central Coachways' existing tours, excursions and private-hire customer base as a budget holiday product, which already has a loyal following in the West Midlands.

"Central has a good customer base, and it would be foolish to lose it," said Mr Flight. "The fleet will be replaced mindful of the margins, and will take on the cream basic colour of the Flights livery, though the branding on the coaches has yet to be decided.

"Central's drivers will join the Flights team, and the existing line management will

Getting tough

TRAFFIC commissioner Keith Waterworth is getting tough with seven Liverpool bus operators alleged to have failed to keep to timetable. The North Western Traffic Area Office launched a series of checks during September and October, with the help of Merseyside PTE. They revealed services running early, late, or not at all, with some buses breaching bus stop waiting restrictions.

The seven operators to appear at public inquiry between 16 and 18 December in Liverpool are: Rest and Ride; Merseybus; North Western Road Car; Village Groups Tours; Merseyline Travel; CMT Buses; and Bussco.

Sentence deferred

SENTENCE has been deferred until 17 December on a bus driver found guilty of violently assaulting an elderly man following an argument over mounting a replacement bus.

Fifty-year-old Travel Dundee driver Eric Stewart denied that, on 19 August last year, he assaulted 70-year-old Thomas Valentine by seizing him, throwing, pushing or pulling him from the platform of a bus, pushing him whereby he fell and sustained injury which permanently impaired his mobility. Mr Stewart also denied acting in a disorderly manner and committing a breach of the peace.

However, the driver was found guilty of both charges following a two-day trial at Dundee sheriff court. Sheriff Davidson confirmed he was giving serious consideration to a custodial sentence.

Latest

OPERATORS feel let down by wave after wave of badly-constructed seatbelt legislation, and are now considering the economics of providing school transport.

As CBW went to press this week, the mailbag was stuffed with 'no' answers to our simple question: Should the Government go ahead with its untested seatbelt proposals?

Overwhelmingly, our readers believe that, if the proposals for an MOT for seatbelts

Police use bus radios

HANDBAG snatchers in Leicester will have to keep eyes peeled for policemen and buses from now on.

Leicester Citybus has turned informer, allowing its two-way radios to be used by the police to send descriptions of thieves direct to drivers, with the hope that they may be spotted faster.

Shoplifters and other criminals begin to proliferate as the Christmas season builds up, say police.



FirstBus

A MASSIVE £80 million order for 800 buses will be delivered to FirstBus by Summer 1999 - including 40 brand-new Wrights articulated lowfloor buses.

The order also marks a departure from multiple liveries, FirstBus following the lead of Stagecoach and then Cowie Group - now Arriva - in giving all vehicles except those in London the same paintwork, and a corporate identity which helps emphasise the company to City investors.

in the UK reinforces its position with 17-vehicle fleet TWM's Central Coachways

run Central Liner."

The acquisition, coming months after Flights Travel Group took over top-quality Dorset coach tour operator Excelsior, brings the Flights Group to 125 coaches. Only Shearings and Wallace Arnold have more coaches... and both are the target of Flights' planned expansion of the Excelsior trading name.

Already Flights is producing a Midlands version of the Excelsior brochure, and now it wants to acquire a northern England or Scottish Borders tour operation to extend the Excelsior branding further north.

"We intend to compete head to head with Shearings and Wallace Arnold for tours and excursion sales," confirmed Mr Flight.



Central Liner to become 'budget' tour wing for West Midlands customer base

belts legislation the last straw?

go ahead, enormous numbers of safe coaches will become useless.

One letter, from Middlesbrough operator Ribbleton Coach and Minibus Hire, was typical in describing the dilemma now faced by small businesses.

Proprietor Dennis Whiteland says the uncertainty of not knowing whether his vehicles will get through MOT has placed his livelihood in jeopardy.

"I feel the legislation has

been rushed through with little consideration for the consequences," says Mr Whiteland. "We must consider the safety of children, but the realities must be dealt with as well.

"If the law has to be upheld and this scenario is correct, will there be any school transport on 10 February? I cannot provide the vehicle the authorities want for the money they are prepared to pay, so do I remove the seatbelts for adult-only

work and let the kids walk to school? Or do we look at an acceptable working arrangement based around getting what you pay for?"

Mr Whiteland says he has done what he can to comply with school transport safety rules: "But to moan about the situation is becoming more attractive than doing something about it. I have considered ceasing school transport as an easier option," he says.

"These are real problems,

and we are being abandoned to sort things out for ourselves."

Mr Whiteland asked CBW to continue its campaign to find a workable compromise, but one seatbelt fitter says his best guess is that half of Britain's retro-fitted coach fleet will fail MOT next year, very often mid-contract with no likelihood of improved prices for a remedial refit of the belts.

■ For the full story, turn to pages 10 and 11.

orders 800 new vehicles for 1998

FirstBus will soon become FirstGroup, but will keep its letter 'F' roundel with the shorter 'First' alongside it. The colour scheme is that unveiled last week (CBW, 20 November) when the new image was announced.

In an off-white, it features dark blue and magenta lines, and will be applied to all FirstGroup lowfloors in the current specification. Subsidiary names will continue to be used in the livery.

The huge order is dominated by Wrights, which is

also delivering 310 Axxess Foline single-decks. Alexander is to supply 100 Royale doubledecks, Dennis, 100 Dart SLF midibuses, of which 55 will be Pointers, while Plaxton will also produce 105 Beaver 2s on Mercedes-Benz Vario chassis.

The order includes 25 Plaxton Palatine doubledecks, but a further 106 buses for CentreWest - 76 midibuses and 30 lowfloor double-decks - will top up the investment to the tune of a further £10 million when the

London operator decides which models will suit its burgeoning London Transport work in the capital.

Where available, every vehicle will be double-glazed and fitted with a climate control heating system. The interior will be to FirstBus standard specification, including bright moquette and pastels.

The Wrights lowfloor articulated buses have yet to be seen in the UK, though the Northern Ireland body-builder is expected the begin delivery in Summer 1998.

Chief executive Moir Lockhead said: "This new order takes the total investment for the two and a half year period to £165 million. We have developed vehicles which are unrivalled in the sector."

■ FIRSTBUS's old stamping ground of Bath got a welcome boost last week when planning permission was granted for a supermarket development at its old depot, freeing the operator to begin work on its new Weston Island home.

INSIDE TRANSIT THIS WEEK

NEWS

FirstBus is prepared to invest in highway infrastructure improvements to help speed up local council pro-bus initiatives if it can be confident that the structure of the industry is to remain stable and able to yield the returns necessary for it to provide the necessary resources.

It is also following Arriva with a new corporate image which is to be applied to brand new and Euro 2 buses in its fleet. The group looks likely to enjoy a boost in profits when it sells a bus depot site to a supermarket chain for a large sum. It has also been successful in diversification and has been named preferred purchaser in the race to buy a controlling interest in Bristol's international airport, and is well on the way to making profits of £60 million and planning further acquisitions.

Stagecoach, in contrast, is facing more competition on its Busways services in Tyne and Wear with independent HMB Buses mounting a new challenge in Sunderland. The Group's share price has also dropped following the publication of a piece of research by City analysts which suggests that its profits will be hit hard if its Porterbrook railway rolling stock leasing company is subjected to regulation by the Government.

The Office of Passenger Rail Franchising has published its interim planning criteria for supporting investment in the 'New Railway'. The report, which outlines policy until the Government's transport White Paper is published, outlines how OPRAF can support TOCs investing in new rolling stock and infrastructure.

RailTex at Wembley was the rail version of a Motor Show. Among the exhibits were a rebodied and refurbished rail vehicle based on a 30-year-old underframe - could this be an idea that originated in the bus industry?

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Sponsorship is no coincidence

WHEN Optare subsidiary Autobus put its name against the small-fleet Operator of the Year category of the 1998 *Coach Industry Awards*, it was no coincidence.

The company's best-known product, the Nouvelle midicoach, was itself winner of one of CBW's prestigious awards in its vehicle class... and has found a ready market among small-fleet operators, who were largely responsible for voting Nouvelle to success.

"How the coach industry presents itself to the travelling public today will play a significant role in the travel in the future," says md Alan White. "The standards on view are those by which we are all to be measured."

"Throughout the country, there is evidence of a determination to continually raise standards and attain the real recognition that coach travel so richly deserves in its valuable contribution to public transport."

Mr White congratulated



Alan White: 'recognition'



the Coach Industry Awards for rewarding excellence, and said the feeling of winning was one he'd cherish, as well as the marketing value of announcing it to the end user - the passenger.

"We at Autobus have twice been fortunate enough to experience the winning feeling, and we recognise the achievements of all finalists, in all categories," he said. "It gives us particular pleasure to sponsor this award."

Rear-engined B7R undercuts price of the Scene set for Volvo's

By Mike Morgan

VOLVO has set the scene for its attack on the mid-leweight coach market in the UK and Eire with the rear-engined B7R. It undercuts the price of the long-established B10M and is targeted directly at the private hire/day excursion and commuter travel sector.

Retail prices are described as "competitive" as the B7R is positioned to directly challenge the mid-engined Dennis Javelin. Its rear-engine configuration, using the 260bhp version of the 7-litre Volvo engine from the FL7 truck, resembles DAF SB2300 and Scania K93. It goes on sale through Volvo dealers, Kirkby and Yeates.

After its World launch in South Africa earlier this year, the B7R was unveiled to the UK industry at the Coach & Bus 97 show last month. First buyer is James Bevan of

Gloucestershire, who signed up at the NEC for a 'splitter' chassis with automatic gearbox for delivery next April/May.

The 53-seat show model has been demonstrated to operators during an extensive tour of Ireland and to UK operators at the first of a series of road shows organised by leading bodybuilder, Plaxton, at Duxford, Cambridgeshire.

B7R is described as a "no nonsense design" by Mike Ball, md of Volvo Bus. The complete vehicle is called the Prima B7R and Plaxton has fitted its 12-metre 320 body to the 6.3-metre wheelbase chassis.

Mr Ball said: "The Prima B7R has been developed jointly by Plaxton and Volvo Bus to meet the growing requirement for a keenly-priced, high-quality coach aimed specifically at the private hire and growing com-

muter travel sector of the market.

"Passengers will welcome the high standard of appointment, and hard-pushed operators will welcome the straightforward, no-nonsense approach adopted for the design of the Prima B7R — the combination offers operators the opportunity to increase their already narrow margins in a fierce and increasingly competitive sector of the market."

Volvo coach sales manager, Don Johnston, says operator reaction to the Prima has been very favourable, though he acknowledged that under-floor luggage space would be improved on those vehicles built using a 'splitter' chassis which effectively removes the chassis members within the wheelbase. He said that, whereas the first Prima had 6.73 cubic metres, the 'splitter' will have eight cubic



All aboard the big bus.

B10M and is aimed at private hire sector middleweight attack



Roadshow gave operators a taste of the performance of the Plaxton/Volvo B7R

metres. He also confirmed that Volvo and Plaxton are jointly working on improved insulation to reduce engine

noise. Other vehicles at the Plaxton roadshow included: new Premiere/Volvo B9M available from Yeates; refur-

bished Expressliner from Kirkby; and the show vehicles displayed on the Plaxton stand at Coach & Bus 97.

Traffic management: 'base on head count'

AWARD-WINNING operator Trent and Barton Buses has called for traffic management based on a head count rather than vehicle numbers in its submission to the Government's transport review.

Trent and Barton asks for the restoration of fuel duty rebate, a tax on car parking, and the creation of much more bus-only roadspace.

It says that money collected from car park tax and other initiatives should be spent on public transport infrastructure.

The Derbyshire-based

operator also calls for tougher car-driving tests, including medical requirements to PCV standard, and the raising of the lower driving age to 18.

It demands the removal of tax from bus season tickets, and the creation of 'safety corridors' around schools, with strict setting-down rules.

The advice has been compiled into a full-colour 24-page booklet, *Developing an Integrated Transport Policy*, which has been submitted to secretary of state for transport John Prescott.

VI staff arrested over MOTs

ESSEX POLICE have arrested four people, including two Vehicle Inspectorate staff, at Purfleet Test Station.

The arrests were made after a joint investigation by the VI and Police into the alleged fraudulent issue of MOT test certificates. The two VI staff were immediately suspended and will be subject to an internal disciplinary procedure.

"There is always a possibility that some individuals will abuse their position and the trust placed in them," said VI chief executive Ron Oliver.



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STRENGTH IN BREADTH

Minister Dr Kim Howells launches training organisation's new status

'TransFED vital to industry's future'

By Mark Williams

AT THE official launch of TransFED's new National Training Organisation status, minister of state Dr Kim Howells MP said the future of the industry depended on it.

Dr Howells, lifelong learning minister, said the future of integrated transport might also be at stake: "I doubt if there is a more important industrial sector at present," he said.

"There is a lot of debate about integrated transport systems," said Dr Howells. "But the transport sector and its employees have such a lousy time with training."

The Confederation of Passenger Transport's training arm, TransFED, is now endorsed by the Government to produce NVQ and SVQ courses specific to coach and bus... a development which Dr Howells

praised. "A great deal of effort has gone into this, showing strategic foresight. The CPT is to be commended for its continuing support, and I believe this heralds a new era for education and training."

"But we must ensure education can be delivered, and we cannot succeed without the willing support of employers. Just as importantly, we should communicate the developments in the industry to employees."

Dr Howells said his own experience of NVQ in presenting certificates demonstrated the importance of vocational training: "I can see from my conversations that those employees have rediscovered education. School was a bad memory for them."

"Now they are getting the learning habit, realising their own potential and enriching their own lives."

Dr Howells said training was not just about expense but competitiveness: "The slogan I thought most appropriate is 'Training for Profit' because that's what training does. Training safeguards your margins."

He said the Government's White Paper on lifelong learning next year would be the most important educational report for 30 years: "I want it to provoke discussion to ensure that lifelong learning is more than just a cliché or a title."

"To make it work, the Government will have to tap the expertise in rooms like this one," he told delegates. "We have to have you on board. We need to learn much more from you than you need to learn from us."

Dr Howells urged the industry to focus training needs and ideas through NTOs and his Government department.

'A tough challenge'

CPT PRESIDENT Moir Lockhead told delegates at the NTO launch it is vital that 50,000 drivers and 10,000 engineers get training by the millennium.

"Quality, delivered at the front end of our businesses, is vital to attaining a higher profile," he said in his opening address. "The smooth running of companies is down to the quality and level of training."

Mr Lockhead, chief executive of FirstBus, said the target to get 60% of all CPT member organisations' employees trained by the year 2000 was a tough challenge. But he said the key to success was TransFED's expertise and the creation of employee incentives for achievement.



Dr Kim Howells: 'We have to have you on board'

Standards aimed at land-based passenger transport

THE National Occupational Standards being offered by TransFED have been specifically aimed at land-based passenger transport. TransFED chairman Mark Thomas outlined the

system and said even the smallest operators could get help with setting out a training programme, administering it and funding it.

"The secret lies in forming partnerships with such

organisations as TECs and developing avenues of funding," he said. Videos produced by TransFED are aimed at explaining how a training programme is assessed and delivered.

Though they are formal qualifications, they do not follow any strict timetable, preventing training impinging on commercial activity.

There are three tiers of NVQ/SVQ attainment.

The system relies on an assessor trained to guide candidates to success - usually an employee. TransFED can also provide assistance with other Government training initiatives.

Organisation sponsors 1998 operator training award

TRANSFED, formally Bus & Coach Training, is once again to sponsor the Coach Industry Awards.

The training arm of the Confederation of Passenger Transport has - logically enough - put its weight behind the 1998 Operator Training Award, due to be presented at the awards ceremony at the Stakis Metropole at the NEC next January.

It's the logical choice for a number of reasons, explains TransFED's chief executive, Malcolm Humphreys: "As the industry's National Training Organisation, we are recognised by Government and other agencies as the authoritative voice on education and training matters."

"We could not be in this position



without the tremendous support we receive from CPT and the wider industry. It is fitting, therefore, we reciprocate by supporting the recognition of training excellence through the Operator Training Award.

"Increasingly, training is seen as an investment inextricably linked to business needs. To this end our industry has committed to challenging targets related to the achievement

of vocational qualifications applicable to most jobs in the industry," he told CBW.

"However, we cannot afford to be complacent - the training message has not reached all corners of our industry. As well as providing clean, environmentally-friendly and well-maintained vehicles, we need to focus on staff and customers - people are our business."

"The Operator Training Award is linked clearly to the people element. It relates to the winner's commitment to training and the resulting business benefits and improved public image. How do we know this? Because previous winners have told us so."

That TransFED was one of the

first National Training Organisations to be recognised (see story, this page) is a feather in our industry's cap, said Mr Humphreys: "However, more importantly NTO status gives the industry a strong voice to influence policy developments and implementation by government and other agencies."

"We can only retain that strong voice if we can demonstrate our industry's commitment to education and training and the broader quality initiatives."

"The Coach Industry Awards help us to do just that. We are proud to be associated with the awards and wish all nominees the best of luck and continued success."



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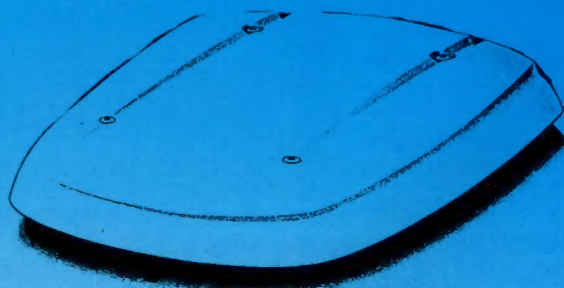
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CPT: says bus seatbelts expected to meet M3

Operators say latest eleventh-hour, kneejerk CPT could press for

By Mark Williams

THE CONFEDERATION of Passenger Transport says it may press for compensation if the new seatbelt MOT fails previously legal coaches.

As CBW's campaign to quash the idea gathers pace, operators have said that the latest twist of the seatbelt knife may finally put them out of business, and will leave education authorities desperate for coaches next Spring, when pre-1988 coaches must be fitted.

Already, it is clear from

voting papers returned that operators do not want this knee-jerk legislation foisted on to them at the 11th hour. So far, they agree that the proposed new rules are unnecessary, inadequate, and anomalous.

Goodwins Coaches of Manchester suggests operators have been let down by the Confederation of Passenger Transport - an accusation refuted by CPT.

"Why does the CPT let the Government push us around," said Geoff Goodwin, a partner at Goodwins

and CPT member. "Just how much more legislation is on the way, and why do we all just sit back and take it?"

Mr Goodwin asks who will pay for certified seatbelt fitment which has, nonetheless, failed the MOT test: "I have said all along, what are the certificates worth?"

But despite Mr Goodwin's accusation, one of the consultation document's harshest critics is the Confederation of Passenger Transport, which accuses the DETR of dragging its feet, ignoring CPT advice and ignoring the

Belt checks inevitable, says Durham CC

DURHAM CITY COACHES said the addition of MOT seatbelts checks was inevitable.

"Any operator that really thought otherwise has been very naive," said Michael Lightfoot, md. "The majority of operators I am sure will have been responsible enough to have retro-fitted seatbelts to best engineering practice, and their vehicles will be given clean bills of health."

But Mr Lightfoot, himself an operator of some 15-year-old coaches, says that, if the new test removed old coaches from the road, he would not be disappointed.

"I am sure there are very few operators driving to work on a daily basis in cars over 15 years of age, yet we expect our customers to hire coaches of this vintage."

"If installation checks lead to some

of these older vehicles being removed from service, I don't see that as being such a bad thing."

"The children we transport to schools are our future customers. These old vehicles we have running around our towns on school contracts give our industry a poor image."

Scarborough-based Alternative Travel says older coaches SHOULD be removed from the roads, and com-

pensation deals offered by Government, similar to those handed out to the fishing fleet and to farmers to eliminate BSE.

Proprietor Malcolm Chambers says any coach or minibus owned for two years should get a retro-fit grant of between £400 and £1,000, or a decommissioning payment of between £2,500 and £10,000 for scrapped vehicles.

AW Group policy paying off

THE AW GROUP'S policy of taking the Iveco roadshow out to the regions is paying dividends.

At a series of strategic venues, AW is showing operators the Italian giant's UK product range while providing ride and drive opportunities.

Having presented the revamped coach and bus models at Coach & Bus 97 last month, the road shows are open to a wider audience and give potential buyers time for a more leisurely assessment.

According to IvecoBus manager, Harry Chambers, the roadshows have met with a favourable reception with the dramatically-styled Maxim 29-seater being one of the stars.

Among the first deals for the £84,950 air-conditioned Maxim has been signed with The Londoners, which is taking two early next year.

Maxim has been billed as a Bedford PJK replacement - mainly as a consequence of its 29-seat capacity and front-engined configuration.



Maxim (foreground) first in line for operator appeal - IvecoBus

It is bodied by Indcar in Spain on the Iveco EuroMidi 80 chassis which is designed for 8.2 tonnes. Mr Chambers says the Maxim has 'I want to travel in that' appeal and the queue of operators waiting to drive the new coach at the Crest Hotel near Heathrow last week was testimony to this opinion.

Also in demand for a test drive was the Beulas Stergo 35-bodied EuroRider which is the first in the UK fitted with ZF AVS gearbox. This new 'semi-automatic' option

is in effect a manual box without a gearlever. Once forward or reverse is selected the clutch is operated as normal and the gearbox selects the appropriate ratio.

There's a facility for manual override but the gearbox system appeared to be very effective as long as the driver waited for a double click felt through the clutch when fully depressed.

Also on display was the 3.2-metre Beulas-bodied Intalina full-size coach and Mellor Opus-bodied Iveco 59.12.

Scottish charity op goes bust

A SCOTTISH charitable organisation which angered local operators by undercutting prices has folded owing thousands of pounds.

Barron Community Coaches in Leven ran half a dozen coaches for disabled and disadvantaged people, but was criticised last year for hiring vehicles to groups in which only one passenger was disabled. It used volunteer drivers and vehicles bought with aid from the council.

Alan Thomson of Dunfermline chartered accountant Thomson, Cooper and Co has now been appointed to wind up affairs and realise any assets.

Debts were reportedly between £60,000 and £90,000 although it was too early to give an exact figure, Mr Thomson told CBW.

The organisation operated a Fife-wide service for the council, private nursing and residential homes, voluntary groups and clubs.

It has blamed its problems largely on slow payment from Fife Council and on its failure to secure a £25,000 grant from the same authority to help finance its activities.

Fife Council insists that only a very small number of Barron Community Coaches' invoices were settled beyond the 21-day payment period requested by the organisation.

legislation may finally close them down

MOT compensation

advice of its own experts.

"Most recently, we have asked the DETR a straight question; will the new seatbelt MOT make illegal coaches which, nonetheless, meet Construction & Use 46 - the legislation we were told was relevant?" said a spokesman for CPT.

"If the answer to that question is 'yes', we will press for compensation."

In its submission to the DETR's consultation, CPT accuses local authorities of forcing through seatbelt retro-fits without DETR guidance, and then facing guidance which came too late:

"Three years ago, CPT was emphatic that comprehensive fitting and testing standards needed to be developed BEFORE operators could be expected to use vehicles with seatbelts," says CPT.

CPT believes the C&U regulations specifying seatbelts which remain attached to the seat after the seat has

broken away from the floor should have been the standard set: "This is particularly relevant as new coaches can still be equipped with belts to this same standard."

"The proposals in the consultation document break this agreement in that the reinforcement of the seat legs, fitment of strengthening plates and positive location of the seat is being specified."

Over half retrofits may fail, specialist claims

ONE specialist seatbelt fitter claims his experience of the market suggests that more than half existing retro-fits will fail the new MoT.

Derek Lawrence, of Nationwide Seatbelts, angered rival companies by suggesting that the proposals will be adopted as they stand, but remains unrepentant: "As far as I can see, the instruction to MOT testers will not be modified substan-

CPT says there should be no testing other than C&U for belts fitted to buses, which CPT specifically told members should not be fitted with belts, though the proposals currently ask buses to reach M3 standard.

It asks that coaches equipped by specialist fitters, who have provided evidence of safety testing, should be exempt from the MOT test.

tially," he told CBW.

"After all, the training videos have already been made."

Mr Lawrence said his advertisement at least focused the industry on an important issue: "As far as I can make out, the DETR has done nothing that doesn't appear in C&U regulations."

"I would have preferred an insistence of M3 standard, with type testing for the vari-



School buses: more than half could fail the MOT

ous vehicles of the kind already done by ourselves and by other reputable fitters including Elite Services and Barry Hall Installations. Had that been adopted, 90% of existing retro-fit would have failed."

He said that operators worried about his own company's seatbelts can be reassured that any MOT failures will be rectified free of charge, but that failure was unlikely, even given the subjective nature of the test.

California dreaming? Then take this trip

COACHING Stateside is the theme of this year's CBW Study Trip. Yes, that's right, we're off to the country that put the capital into capitalism to see and hear about all the very latest in US coach hardware and operations.

We've teamed up with Paul Tappin to put together a trip that will centre on the United Motorcoach Association's annual Bus Expo - a winning combination of major coach show, business sessions, day tours and social events. And, as next year's Bus Expo is in Sacramento, California, you'll be able to enjoy the double benefits of exchanging business ideas with US operators and getting away from the leaden skies of England in February to some welcome Winter sun. An added bonus is that we will also be taking in the magical city of San Francisco. What could be better?

Our five-night tour includes entrance to the show and business sessions, plus admission to the evening opening night reception at the California State Railroad Museum. What is bound to attract the most interest is the business session dealing with the rise and rise of Coach USA. In American terms, Coach USA is a



The consolidator: 25 family-owned coach ops bought out in 18 months

consolidator. In anyone else's, it's a venture capital-backed organisation intent on bringing big business to coaching. In under two years, it has taken over 25 American, family-owned coach companies and now runs more than 2,000 coaches. It has been so successful that other groups are now trying to emulate it.

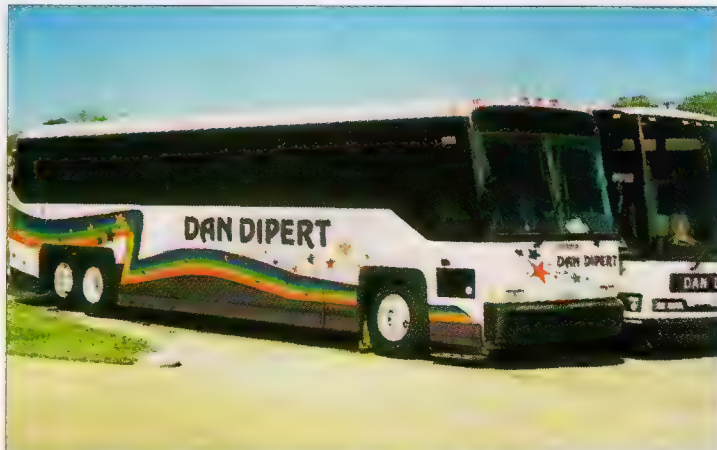
What happens in the States invariably comes over here, so our study trip will offer a unique chance to see exactly how it works on home ground. A whole business section will be devoted to this topic but, on top of that, we are also arranging a special forum where UK coach operators can compare and contrast their operations with US operators. That will be a great opportunity to pick up new business ideas.

After Bus Expo, we will leave the luxury of Sacramento's Hilton Hotel for two days in San Francisco. Our hotel here is in the famous Fisherman's Wharf district and, as well as being able to experience the city's hair-raising tram system, you will also be given an inside tour of a major coach operator's business in the Bay area.

It's definitely a trip not to be missed. And, from £985 per person, plus a

£199.50 single supplement, demand (as usual) is bound to be high. Airline arrangements mean space is strictly limited, so make sure of your place by booking early.

The 1998 CBW Study Tour USA leaves London Heathrow on Saturday 31 January and returns on Friday 6 February. Full details are available from Paul Tappin at Tappin Coaches, Didcot on 01235 819393; fax 01235 816464.



Coaching Stateside: your chance to talk to operators in good old US of A

The driver shortage continues unabated. Mark Williams reports

Recruitment drive spreads to the East

DRIVER SHORTAGE may be tackled by advertising as far afield as Eastern Europe, and by attracting the homeless as the situation worsens.

Some operators are warning service cuts may result from poor recruitment, and now the Government may insist the industry joins others in its Welfare to Work programme.

One company affected by poor recruitment has been Calderline which recently had to cut late-night weekend journeys, being short of seven drivers: "The problem is people need only give a week's notice, yet it takes a long time to get new staff through the system and up to standard," md Mark Savelli told a local paper.

A bout of 'flu at the time also reduced available staff,

but Mr Savelli admitted recruitment ads had met with little success, while a T&G union spokesman said drivers were loathe to work what they viewed as excessive overtime.

One company at the forefront of the more extreme recruitment measures is London General, which has had to foreshorten LT contracts through lack of drivers. London General considering sourcing drivers through Streets Ahead, a London homeless support group, and recruiting immigrant workers.

"We think employing other nationalities may have some potential - as do the hotel trade and other service industries which have much lower pay and conditions than ours," said md Keith Ludeman.

"It's a matter of broadening our recruitment base, but we have the same problems as everyone with staff retention. This is a function of the strength of the economy, in which the service sector always suffers."

Mr Ludeman says he is also looking carefully at a length-of-service pay structure, with significant year-on-year increments, though the combination of higher pay and lower hours contributed to a 9.5% pay rise at London General last year.

London United md David Humphrey says retention of drivers is as big a problem as recruitment, with at least a third of all recruits leaving within a year.

"Driver shortage is sweeping the country, and we are not immune from it here in West London," he told CBW. "Heathrow Airport helps create a macro economy here, being the biggest 'port' in the UK. This logistics hub has been overheated for some time, and the bus industry has been made uncompetitive with others, such as distribution and warehousing."

Mr Humphreys says that,

although London United has reduced shifts by an average of an hour and eliminated the worst shifts, made above-average pay awards, and is looking at improved working conditions, part of the solution may well rest with Government.

"Congestion is getting worse at a faster rate than the introduction of bus priority. If we can get buses to run to schedule, we can reduce our requirement of drivers, improve efficiency, and do more on wages."

Coach drivers are also hard to come by, said Nigel Skills of Skills of Nottingham: "We have a good core of drivers who stay with us. The problems come when we try to expand the pool."

"Driver turnover at our new Brighton base is fairly high, a result I guess of the high cost and standard of living down there," Mr Skill told CBW. "To be frank, coach driving is not the most wonderful prospect, with its anti-social hours and the need to be away from home, sometimes for days. The career coach driver is a rare employee."

Beverley operator Galina Travel has found its new staff with the help of Hull Joblink, using cash support to help fund investment in new vehicles. The battlefield tour specialist has so far taken half its staff of 10 from the dole queue.

Shortages being faced by Warners of Tewkesbury prompted the coach and bus operator to advertise in other corners of the country for staff - with good results.

"We placed advertisements in three newspaper in an area of high unemployment, and got a far better response than we have in Gloucestershire," said md Nick Warner.

Warners offered various incentives for qualified drivers, including temporary accommodation and shift patterns to allow a regular week off.



Turn for the worse: bus driver shortage crisis continues



United we stand: London United md says congestion worsens working conditions

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55 seats, power door, full soft trim, finished cream/red. M.O.T MARCH 1998

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57 seats, finished all white.

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53 reclining seats, courier seat, finished cream/maroon/yellow. M.O.T NOVEMBER 1998

1987 BOVA FUTURA FHD

53 reclining seats, centre continental door, provision for toilet, courier seat, finished cream/maroon/yellow.

M.O.T NOVEMBER 1998

1987 VOLVO B10M PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3200

53 reclining seats, finished white with green/blue flash on sides.

M.O.T DECEMBER 1997

1989 VOLVO B10M CAETANO ALGARVE

53 seats, finished all white.

M.O.T MARCH 1998

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DEAUVILLE 599

51 reclining seats, toilet + exec. spec., finished white/yellow/orange. ONE ONLY

M.O.T JANUARY 1998

1987 SETRA 215HR

49 reclining seats, toilet + exec. spec., including SUTRAK AIR CONDITIONING, finished silver.

M.O.T MARCH 1998

1987 DAF MB 230 DKFL 12M PLAXTON

PARAMOUNT 3500

51 reclining seats, toilet + exec. spec., finished white/orange stripe.

M.O.T NOVEMBER 1997

1987 VOLVO B10M PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3500

49 reclining seats, centre sunken toilet, continental door, courier seat, finished cream/maroon/yellow.

M.O.T NOVEMBER 1998

COACHES UNDER £14000

1981 DAF PLAXTON SUPREME

53 seats, power door, brown interior, finished brown/cream. M.O.T JULY 1998

1982 LEYLAND TIGER DUPLÉ GOLDLINER IV

53 seats, recent retrim, courier seat, finished cream/duo brown. M.O.T JULY 1998

1979 BEDFORD YMT PLAXTON SUPREME

53 seats with seat belts, finished blue/white. M.O.T JUNE 1998

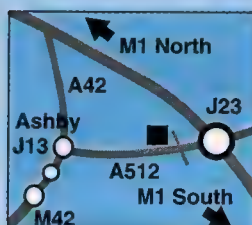
MINIS

1987 FREIGHT ROVER SHERPA CARLYLE MK1 BODY

20 Bus type seats + 5 standeeze, full soft trim, radio, power door, finished all white. M.O.T JUNE 1998

1988 FREIGHT ROVER SHERPA CARLYLE MK II COACHWORK

16 high back coach seats, parcel racks, luggage pen to rear, power door, finished white. M.O.T MAY 1998



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Jonckheere Deauville P45L

C/2811/01

53 Recliners, Crew Seat, Rear Continental door, Power Door, Seat belts, R & P.A. Telma retarder, Double glazing, Carpet.



1992 DENNIS JAVELIN 240
Plaxton Paramount 3200

C/2811/02

53 Recliners, Power door, R & P.A. Curtains, Double glazing.



1992 SCANIA K93
Van Hool Alizee

C/2811/03

55 Recliners, Crew seat, Power door, Drivers fan, Seat belts.



1988 LEYLAND TIGER
Plaxton Paramount 3200

C/2811/04

55 Recliners, Power door, Telma retarder, R & P.A. Aircraft lockers.

1989 DENNIS JAVELIN 240
Duplex 320

C/2811/05

53 Recliners, Crew Seat, Power door, Curtains, Seat belts.

1988 DAF SBR 3000
Plaxton Paramount 4000

C/2811/06

71 Recliners, Power door, Crew seat, Fridge & Boiler, Drivers Bunk, Telma retarder, R & P.A. Toilet.

1989 VOLVO B10M T
Plaxton Paramount 4000

C/2811/07

67 Recliners, Centre toilet, Telma retarder, 4 Video monitors, Centre server, G7 gear box.

1983 VOLVO B10M
Plaxton Paramount 3500

C/2811/08

49 Recliners, Crew seat, Rear toilet, Plug door, Telma retarder, Wired for video, Drinks boiler, Curtains.

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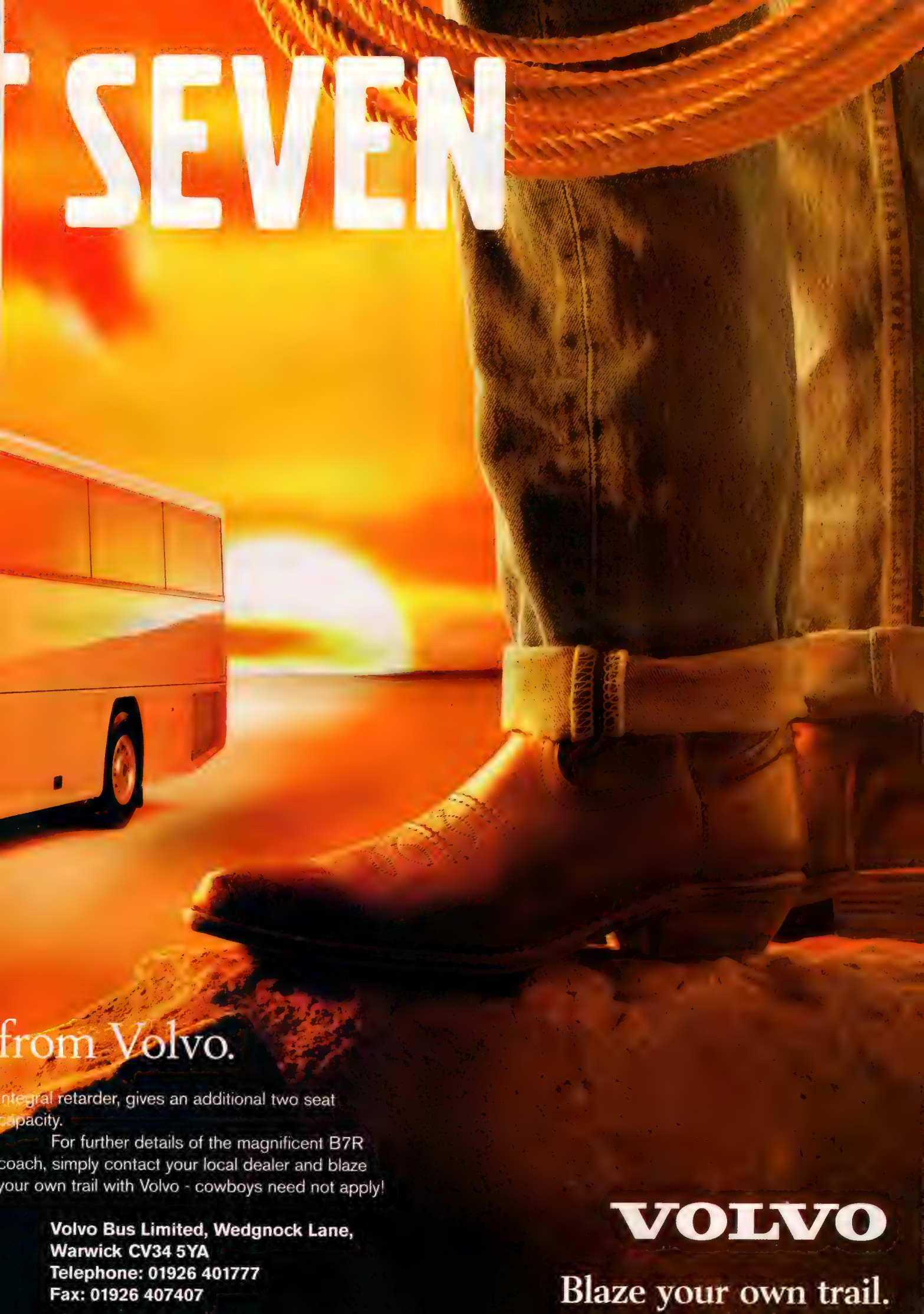
The B7R also enjoys many features of the B10M,

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Volvo has teamed up with Plaxton to offer operators an unbeatable vehicle package, based on the highly successful 12m Premiere 320 body, called the Prima B7R.

The Prima B7R is available on either a full 6.3m or split 3.25m chassis, with a choice of manual or automatic ZF transmission.

The manual option, with Telma retarder as standard, seats 55 passengers - the automatic, with



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VOLVO

Blaze your own trail.

Charges for coaches at Euston are waived

CHARGES for coaches setting-down and picking-up passengers at Euston Station are being waived following discussions between Railtrack and Clarkes of London.

The matter came to light when a Clarkes driver was told he would have to pay £20 to enter the London station, rather than set-down in Eversholt Street, where he faced being given a £60 ticket by zealous traffic wardens.

As Clarkes is involved in the substantial movement of groups to and from hotels, airports, ports and stations on a daily basis, Malcolm Braid, the company's transport manager, wrote to Railtrack. Mr Braid said it was "somewhat incongruous" to levy such a charge, as Clarkes was bringing or fetching passengers who will be, or have, travelled on the railway.

Amanda Mason, Railtrack's business development manager, responded by saying there would now be no charges for coaches entering the station, and requested that, whenever possible, drivers should inform the station when they are arriving.

Coaches are now asked to call the Duty Station Manager on 0171 320 0514, or Security Gate 1 on 0171 957 1807. Drivers should report to Security Gate 1, in Eversholt Street, on arrival where they will be advised where to wait.

New venture should be up and running early in the P&O Stena merger -



Sea change: the new partners hope to have the operation ready early in the New Year

Principal terms remain unchanged

The principal terms of the merger remain much as announced on 3 October 1996. Russ Peters, currently md of P&O European Ferries (Dover), becomes chief executive of the new company, which will be called P&O Stena Line. It will be owned 60% by P&O and 40% by Stena Line, but with equal voting rights.

It will have a fleet of 14 vessels, 11 passenger ships and the three carriers on the P&O freight service to Zee-

brugge. Three ships - two from Stena and one from P&O - will be taken out of commission but remain within the company. One of these might be transferred to replace the Stena Antrim on the Newhaven-Dieppe route.

Savings of some £75 million will be made through the joint venture. Naturally, there will be job losses and these have been put at a minimum of 600 and possibly more than 1,000.

Lothian lays on the line dancing

LINE dancing and golf are among the themed breaks in an expanded 1998 British and Continental holiday programme from Lothian Region Transport.

Demand for country music and line dancing excursions has been so strong that the Edinburgh operator is running three country music and line dancing cruises in March and nine dancing weekends through the season.

The three-day cruises are via P&O North Sea Ferries and cost from £66 per per-

son. The cruises depart on 10 and 24 March, when they include a visit to Gouda and Delft, and 17 March, when the tour is to Bruges and Ostend. Trips to the Dutch Bulbfields are also available from £79 in April and May.

Other Continental destinations include an eight-day tour to The Black Forest and the Wine Road of Alsace, for £315, and a 10-day tour to Switzerland for £495. The latter departs on 6 September and includes three nights in the village of Wild-

haus and a trip on the Glacier Express.

The nine UK line dancing weekends run through the season and cost from £49 departing in January and February. These are based in the three-star Quality Station Hotel, in Ayr, and include one night's half-board accommodation and two sessions of line dancing and tuition.

Three-day golfing weekends start at £140 for a trip to The Belfry, in Warwickshire, and from £105 based at Longhirst Hall, in

Northumberland.

Other themed breaks include a three-day Old Time Music Hall for £108 and a three-day Telly Addicts weekend for £95. The Music Hall trip is based in Leeds and includes a visit to the City Varieties Theatre for a performance of *The Good Old Days*. The Telly Addicts tour is based in Harrogate and includes a tour of Wensleydale, where *All Creatures Great and Small* was filmed, and the village of Esholt, which is used in the filming of *Emmerdale*.



The UK programme also includes a four-day tour to the Chelsea Flower Show, for £159 and an eight-day trip to Torquay from £270.

New Year after Margaret Beckett sanctions the go-ahead ops await new deals

By William Golden

OPERATORS up and down the country are waiting to see what deals await them on the short-sea Channel ferry crossings, now the long-awaited merger between P&O European Ferries and Stena Line has finally been given the go-ahead.

Months of rumour and speculation ended when an announcement was made on the Wednesday of the World Travel Market, an appropriate forum for a venture that will have far-reaching effects on travel in and out of the UK.

The two new business partners are now getting down to business and are hoping that the new venture will be in operation early in the New Year.

Margaret Beckett, President of the Board of Trade, sanctioned the go-ahead on the condition that P&O and Stena Line gave undertakings in respect of fares.

These relate to a cap on fares after the abolition of duty-free sales in July 1999.

The undertakings have to be given by 19 February of next year, otherwise Mrs Beckett said she would consider making an enforcement order. Many people in the travel industry are still opposed to the abolition of duty-free sales, but it seems inevitable that this will go ahead in under two years time.

Despite the conditions, the decision was welcomed by the two prospective partners. Bo Lerenius, Stena Line's chief executive, said: "It is good news not just for Stena and P&O but also for the consumer, who will have strong and viable competition, as well as an even better level of service. We hope to have the new company ready to commence operations early in the New Year."

Lord Sterling, P&O chairman, said: "We are naturally pleased that a positive decision has, at long last, been

taken. It is particularly encouraging that the authorities have accepted virtually all of our arguments.

"We do not foresee any problems in negotiating the proposed undertakings."

The go-ahead was also welcomed by Eurotunnel, which operates Le Shuttle services through the Channel Tunnel. A spokeswoman said the company had been in favour of the proposal from the outset and believed it would lead to rationalisation on the short-sea Channel routes.

There was more caution from SeaFrance, which will continue to operate an independent service between Dover and Calais. The company opposed the merger from the start and threatened to use every means possible to block it. As an independent operator, SeaFrance is concerned about the effects of any price-fixing between the two principal players.



Ready for business: P&O chairman Lord Sterling sees no problems in meeting the pricing undertakings

Guide aims to boost visits to Suffolk

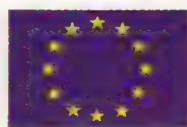
A NEW GUIDE featuring short breaks in Suffolk has been launched as part of an initiative to encourage more group business to the region.

Marketed under the banner, *Yours to Discover*, the 36-page brochure covers the coastal region from Felixstowe in the south, through Orford, Aldeburgh and Southwold, up to Lowestoft on the Norfolk border. Inland, it embraces towns and villages such as Framlingham, Bungay, Eye, Saxmundham and Snape.

The mix of coast and countryside makes the area ideal for coach touring, and the publication includes details of places to stay and eat, plus suggested itineraries.

The guide has been produced as part of a marketing campaign by a total of four local authorities - Mid Suffolk District Council, Suffolk Coastal District Council, Waveney District Council and Suffolk County Council.

Copies of the guide are available by calling 01271 336016 (24 hours), or by writing to the Suffolk Coast and Countryside, Upcott Avenue, Pottington Industrial Estate, Barnstable, Devon EX31 1HN.



EUROWATCH

WEATHER

DIESEL PRICES

HOLIDAY POUND

City	Average temperature last week	City	Average temperature last week	Country	Diesel price per litre in Sterling	Country	Diesel price per litre in Sterling	Country	Currency exchange rate	Country	Currency exchange rate
AA Out and About with AA Roadwatch											
Amsterdam	3C/37F	Madrid	13C/55F	Austria	0.47	Luxembourg	0.37	Austria	20.05 Sch/£	Italy	2,810 Lire/£
Athens	18C/64F	Oslo	2F/36F	Belgium	0.48	Netherlands	0.47	Belgium	58.78 Bfr/£	Netherlands	3.20 Gld/£
Berlin	2C/36F	Paris	12C/54F	Eire	0.52	Norway	0.63	Denmark	10.92 K/£	Norway	11.60 Nkr/£
Brussels	8C/46F	Rome	10C/50F	France	0.45	Portugal	0.40	Eire	1.09 Punt/£	Portugal	291 Es/£
Dublin	10C/50F	Stockholm	2C/36F	Germany	0.42	Spain	0.40	France	9.52 F/£	Spain	239 Pta/£
Lisbon	17C/63F	Vienna	1C/34F	Greece	0.38	Sweden	0.54	Germany	2.05 DM/£	Sweden	12.51 SKr/£
Luxembourg	2C/36F	Zurich	8/46F	Italy	0.54	Switzerland	0.53	Greece	449 D/£	Switzerland	2.31 Sfr/£

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Leave and cool off says Pugh



TRIBUNAL

COACH operator David Stolzenberg was told to leave a Cardiff disciplinary inquiry and consider his position before his continuing after his aggressive answers shocked South Wales traffic commissioner John Mervyn Pugh.

Mr Stolzenberg who, in partnership with his wife Maureen, trading as Llynfi Coaches, of Birchgrove, Queen Mary's Lane, Maesteg, holds a licence for 24 vehicles, had been called before the commissioner to explain why he had not reported a conviction for using a vehicle without an MoT test certificate.

Mr Stolzenberg said the coach concerned was not meant to be used but was taken out by a driver in error and the fitters had been unable to catch up with him.

He had forgotten to inform the commissioner due to pressures created by moving three times in a year and developing a business site in Maesteg worth £1million.

After being asked to leave the hearing because of the tone of his answers, Mr Stolzenberg returned and told the commissioner that a number of measures had since been implemented.

Regular checks were now carried out on drivers' licences to ensure none had any criminal convictions.

All their vehicles had recently been through fresh MoT tests.

Each fitter was responsible for six of the 24 vehicles and a rolling road brake tester had been installed at a cost of £55,000.

"We are the envy of all in the area," said Mr Stolzenberg.

Adjourning the proceedings for a fortnight, Mr Pugh said he was not satisfied with the changes made.



Pugh: not satisfied with changes

Op banned from running

But commissioner grants application



LICENSING

CHELMSFORD Cab Co has been banned from operating 62 of its 64 registered services by Eastern traffic commissioner Brigadier Compton Boyd.

In addition, the commissioner has prohibited the company from using vehicles to provide any new local services for six months.

However, the commissioner has granted an application by the company, of 1 Bishop Road, Chelmsford, Essex, to increase its licence authorisation from 109 to 129 vehicles. Brigadier Boyd said that, in January and February, md Richard Matthews had visited the Traffic Area Office to seek information and advice about the running of registered services.

He subsequently submitted a batch of 70 registrations at a cost of £2,600, 62 of which were linked to existing school contracts.

On 7 May Essex County Council wrote to the company saying no concessionary fare reimbursement was due because the seven local services due to commence on 1 April had not begun to operate.

Mr Matthews replied, saying he'd had "technical problems" and the services would commence on 1 July with the exception of the "Chelmsford Loop" which would commence on 1 June.

On 15 May the Traffic Area wrote to the company saying complaints had been received from a competitor that the seven routes due to com-

mence on 1 April had not been run as registered, nor were they displaying route numbers or destination boards.

In his reply, Mr Matthews remarked: "It seems that my enthusiasm has exceeded my practical knowledge, particularly when dealing with bureaucracy." He went on to say that, while he understood he could not start operating a registered route before its commencement date he had not realised he was obliged to start on that given date.

He gave the reason that Essex County Council would not allow him to join the Concessionary Fares Scheme until 1 July.

The company was sent a warning letter on 22 May over its failure to run registered services, which made it clear the services were to start running immediately and they would be monitored to establish they were being operated. Seven of the registrations were cancelled in September.

Tom Roberts, a member of the Traffic Area staff, said he and a colleague had carried out a series of monitoring exercises on two dates in June. They concluded none of the routes was being run as registered and, indeed, there was little evidence that any vehicles were being operated at all.

Robert Block, of the fuel duty rebate team, said they had carried out monitoring exercises on 10 days in July. There were times when they

could find no evidence that any of the routes were being operated apart from the Chelmsford Loop, and when they were, they were not being operated in a pattern which matched the registered particulars.

Many vehicles were seen without destination boards and some were presumably off route.

In regard to the 29 school services which had been registered as open to the public to attract fuel duty rebate, they carried out a boarding exercise to see of they were, in fact, open to the public, said Mr Block.

On four occasions drivers refused to allow them to board because they were 'school buses', on 14 occasions vehicles did not arrive at scheduled stops, and on six occasions buses failed to stop when hailed.

When the buses were followed, it was found that few, if any, seemed to be operating on registered routes. All but two of the vehicles seen had no destination boards displayed with the result that the general public would not have been aware they were local services available to them, and some of the vehicles were clearly operating at the behest of the children they were carrying and that was the determining factor so far as the routing of vehicles was concerned.

For the company, John Alban-Williams said that, by registering so many new services, Mr Matthews had made an error of judgement and

Eastern Counties has licence authorisation



MAINTENANCE

CONCERN over the number of prohibition notices imposed on vehicles belonging to FirstBus subsidiary Eastern Counties Omnibus has led to the company's O-licence authorisation being cut from 440 to 418 vehicles by Eastern Traffic Commissioner Brigadier Compton Boyd.

The commissioner has reserved decision at a Cambridge disciplinary inquiry over what action to take against the company, of 79 Thorpe Road, Norwich, Norfolk, after hearing that a total of 71 prohibition notices had been imposed on its vehicles, including 19 in 1997 alone. (CBW, 6 November.)

In his decision, Brigadier Boyd said that, between September 1985 and March 1996, the company had been sent two warning letters and had attended two interviews with the traf-

fic area clerk. Despite that, the Vehicle Inspectorate continued to criticise its maintenance performance and that led to a further warning letter in January. Since then Eastern Counties' vehicles had been issued with 11 immediate prohibitions, five of which were endorsed as showing a significant maintenance failure, and eight delayed prohibitions, one of which was also endorsed 'S'.

However, a mathematical headcount could be misleading, said the commissioner. Having listened to the detailed evidence he considered the company had no reasonable excuse for six of the 11 immediate prohibitions and four of the delayed ones. He also noted several prohibitions were for single items like oil leaks.

While he was aware that the company's vehicles travelled some 17.8 million miles a year, a factor which had to be considered when weighing the incidence of prohibitions, he was

also aware that, over the past five years, Eastern Counties' vehicles had been issued with 31 immediate prohibitions, three of which were 'S' marked, and 21 delayed prohibitions, two of which were 'S' marked.

Against that background there was a strong case for considering taking severe action against the licence, said Brigadier Boyd.

What had the company had to say for itself? It claimed its systems were generally sound and had only failed at certain depots due to circumstances. The company had been quick to admit management had failed to spot in advance the consequences of those circumstances but had said systems were now in place which would continually monitor performance.

All its staff were now better trained and were all part of a regime wedded to a safety culture which contained a series of checks and balances. In addition there had been a very significant

62 out of its 64 services

to increase authorisation by 20

over extended the company beyond its capacity to cope.

There had been no complaints from the schools about the service they were receiving.

The Chelmsford Loop was now being run strictly in accordance with its registered particulars.

It was running during the monitoring exercises but perhaps problems which had necessitated running substitute vehicles without destination boards gave the inspectors a false impression.

The drivers had all now been instructed that the school contract vehicles were available to the public.

Mr Matthews was an enterprising individual who wished to marry his commercial aspirations with the needs of the travelling public, said Mr Alban-Williams. He was full of new ideas.

With the fuel duty rebate money he hoped to qualify for he intended to expand his operations in other directions which he felt the general public would support.

If he were to lose these registered services, it would, therefore, represent a swinging punishment so far as his financial expectations were concerned.

The school bus contracts would not be affected, however. They would simply not be serving the general public and thus ineligible for fuel duty rebate.

Mr Matthews had learned by his mistakes and the services were now running in accordance with their registered particulars.

Cancelling the registrations, which effectively left the company with the Chelmsford Loop and a service registered in 1995, Brigadier Boyd said Mr Matthews had sought and been given advice a good two months before the registrations came into effect. Under the circumstances, there was no reasonable excuse for his failure to run them, and run them properly.

He thought Mr Matthews had responded to the Traffic Area's letter of 15 May with a flippant reply and, if his statement that he did not think he was obliged to commence the registrations on the due date was true, it displayed a degree of ignorance which was not to his credit.

The findings of the monitoring teams showed not so much the company was inactive but more that it seemed to have chosen its own movement patterns from day to day to satisfy what it considered to be its commercial aspirations.

The refusal of several drivers to allow inspectors to board the 'school bus' registered services suggested a management which did not care or at best failed to inform its staff. Either way it showed a blatant disregard for the registration regime.

Mr Matthews, who personified the company, had allowed his enthusiasm

for commercial success to take precedence over the need to operate within the rules relating to the operation of registered services.

Indeed, said Brigadier Boyd, he considered Mr Matthews had "ridden rough shod" over them and, in the process, not surprisingly, had given his competitors cause to complain, the county council to express its displeasure and for the Traffic Area and fuel duty rebate team to carry out time-consuming monitoring exercises.

It was precisely to avoid such a state of affairs that s26 of the 1985 Act was created in the hope the powers given to Traffic Commissioners would be a deterrent to those who might be tempted to operate unfairly and unpredictably, thus threatening to undermine the benefits of a deregulated industry.

He sensed that Mr Matthews had found it difficult to reconcile his crusading instincts with the need to observe the licensing rules, dismissing the system where it seemed to frustrate his intentions as "bureaucratic."

While the company's reputation had not formally been challenged on this occasion, he would certainly consider that option if the past was shown to repeat itself.

If that were to be the case the operator's licence itself would be placed in jeopardy.

As far as the additional vehicles were concerned, Brigadier Boyd said there were no reasons, maintenance, finance, reputation or otherwise why he should refuse that application.

Who's to blame for Shaw liquidation?



INQUIRY

NORTH EASTERN
Traffic Commissioner Keith Waterworth wants to know who is to blame for the liquidation of Barnsley-based Terry Shaw Coachways Ltd.

The commissioner wants to make inquiries of the liquidator and he has given former director Terry Shaw 14 days in which to supply him with the name of the liquidator.

Though accepting the surrender of the one-vehicle licence held by Mr Shaw, of 6 Haverlands Ridge, Worsborough, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, at a Leeds public inquiry, Mr Waterworth has adjourned consideration of what to do about a similar licence held by the company from the same address.

Mr Shaw said Terry Shaw Coachways Ltd had gone into liquidation in June 1996 and he understood the licence had been returned by the liquidator. Mr Shaw said the liquidators were a firm in Leicester and he could not recall their name. His own licence had not been used since June 1996. They had continued using the Terry Shaw licence until the last few months. They gradually found the work was just not coming in and they decided to call it a day.

The commissioner referred to a cutting from a local newspaper relating to a raid on TS Holidays Ltd premises by trading standards officers. Mr Shaw said that was a separate company which had ceased trading but had not yet been placed in liquidation. "Trading standards are causing the delay because they have got all the paperwork," said Mr Shaw.

Agreeing there were customers who had said they had paid for holidays they had not had, Mr Shaw said: "The payment of refunds is held up because Trading Standards have all the documents."

Agreeing with the commissioner that Trading Standards were no doubt looking to see if there had been fraudulent trading, Mr Shaw said: "I don't feel I have anything to fear from them as everything was in order." He had now left coaching totally.

However, the commissioner said he still had some concern about the liquidation of Terry Shaw Coachways. "I need to find out who was to blame," he said.

The big problem was the hotels and the holiday side of the business, said Mr Shaw.

Mr Waterworth said that, if he heard anything adverse from the liquidator, or about the way TS Holidays was run, it might well have implications for Mr Shaw's haulage O-licence.

cut to 418

investment in new and newer vehicles. All was now well, as it had been since the beginning of July.

The commissioner accepted Eastern Counties appeared to have turned the corner. That had been confirmed by recent VI checks and the unevenness of performance across the various depots seemed to have been ironed out. Some fairly radical changes had been made and disciplinary action had been robust. For that reason he was not going to revoke the licence.

However, there was a penalty to pay for the company's dereliction of duty over such an extended period and despite a lengthy series of meetings and warnings.

The penalty was also meant to give a clear signal to the company that any further major problems with maintenance would have serious consequences, said Brigadier Boyd. He directed his decision take effect from the beginning of December.



Eastern Counties: some fairly radical changes had been made

Time is running out for those operators whose house is not in order

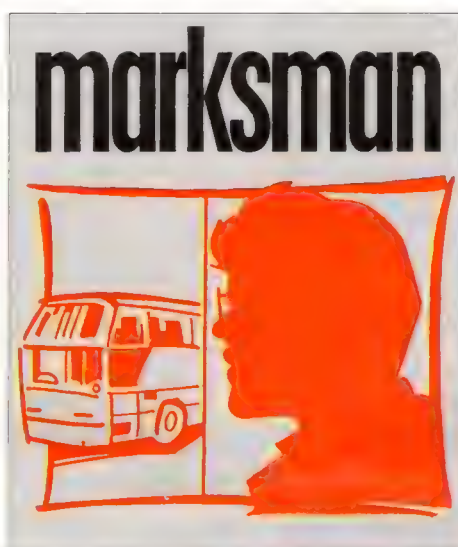
BACK IN JUNE (CBW, 7 June) I answered a question about the EU proposals to raise entry standards to the industry. I made it plain that established operators would also be reviewed to ensure they continued to meet the revised standards. I had rather expected this might have provoked some correspondence - whether in support or containing howls of anguish. But nothing.

Absolute silence.

I return to this again as, with only slight amendments, the proposals are moving on through the EU legislative procedure and may well be law by the middle of next year. While they may steady up the inflow of new entrants to the profession, I think they might also accelerate the departure of some too. Although this lessening of the numbers of PSVs chasing work may be welcome by those of us who are left, without some careful planning for the future some operators could find themselves in enforced exile.

The proposals in relation to available capital are shown in Table 1 and the effect on various sizes of operation in Table 2. Although the EC rules are expressed in ECU, I have converted the figures to £ sterling at current exchange rates so the scale of the increase is not concealed by meaningless digits.

Let me make two things plain. The figures shown in the tables represent the minimum AVAILABLE capital that is required at present, and is proposed to be required in the future. This is not



the total of the capital account as shown on the balance sheet, nor is it the true value of vehicles and perhaps freehold premises. It is, to all intents and purposes, spare cash in the bank, or an unused loan or overdraft facility.

The whole point is that is has to be available to fund the day-to-day running of the operation - and that cannot realistically be done by selling the assets.

The second thing that every operator in the land needs to understand - and perhaps be starting to develop contingency plans now - is that these proposals do not only apply to new entrants. The EU proposal is that the relevant national body, in our case the Traffic Commissioner, will be required to assess the good repute, professional competence requirements and the financial standing of all operators at five-yearly intervals and furthermore to assess between the second and third year during each five-year period the requirements of financial standing.

In simple words, this means that about every 30 months or so, every operator is going to have to show that he has at least the minimum available capital appropriate to the number of vehicles authorised on the licence - or face the risk of the licence being reduced or revoked.

I respectfully suggest that, for those operators who are constantly in combat with their overdraft limits, who live with a daily cash-flow problem and who are thus forced to pay bills late, the time available to get the financial house in order is pitifully short, assuming the EU legislation continues to run to its planned timetable.

Even for those not sailing so close to the wind, it might make good sense to plan the big and long-term capital purchases on vehicles or premises coming up in the near future in such a way that sufficient capital remains accessible and available so that no problems arise in demonstrating that the new financial standing requirements are met.

I should perhaps also mention again the proposed change in the rules on good repute, lest they had not sunk in.

Again, they may be a spring-trap set to chop the legs off unsuspecting operators. At present the good repute of an operator may be lost if the owner or the company is convicted of more than one 'serious offence'.

When these proposals take effect just a single serious offence is sufficient for good repute to be lost. At present a serious offence is defined as one for which a sentence of three months imprisonment, a community service order for more than 60 hours or a fine of more than £2,500 is imposed. This could mean that just one conviction for a substantial driving hours offence, or a single conviction for using a vehicle in a dangerous condition, could put an operator out of business.

Tough stuff this. Some will welcome it, some will have cause to regret it. I only hope that no one will bury their heads in the sand. It is coming, it is coming soon and almost certainly without any softening amendments as it completes its legislative progress. The prudent will start putting their houses in order now. Others may wake up too late and find that their houses have gone.

TABLE 1

PRESENT	IN RESPECT OF:	PROPOSED	% more
£2,150	First vehicle, 20+ seats	£6,450	200%
£110 per seat	First vehicle, with 8-20 seats	£6,450	388% on 12 seater
£2,150	Subsequent vehicles, 20+ seats	£3,580	67%
£110 per seat	Subsequent vehicles, 8 - 20 seats	£180 per seat	64% on 12 seater

TABLE 2

PRESENT	WITH FLEET :	PROPOSED	% more
£3,960	3 x 12 seaters	£10,770	171%
£10,750	5 x 20+ seaters	£20,770	93%
£21,500	10 x 20+ seaters	£38,670	80%
£43,000	20 x 20+ seaters	£74,470	73%

The proposals in relation to available capital are shown in Table 1 and the effect on various sizes of operation in Table 2

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1993 "K" VOLVO B10M Jonckheere Deauville 53R
1992 "K" VOLVO B10M Jonckheere Deauville 53R
1992 "J" DAF SB2305 Plaxton 3200 DH 53R
1992 "J" DAF SB2305 Van Hool Alizee DH 51R/Toilet

BUSES FROM OUR HIRE FLEET

1995 "N/M" DAF SB220 Northern Counties Paladin 49 Str
1995 "M" DAF SB220 Ikarus Citibus 49 Str
1992 "K" DAF SB220 Ikarus Citibus 49 Str
1992 "J" DAF SB220 Ikarus Citibus 42 Coach Seats

1992 "J" DAF SB2305 DHTD Duple 320SL 57R
1991 "H" DAF SB2305 DHTD Duple 320SL 57R
1990 "G" DAF MB230 LT Plaxton 3500 49R/T
1990 "G" DAF SB3000 Van Hool Alizee SH 49R/Toilet
1990 "G" VOLVO B10M Plaxton 3500 51R/Toilet
1990 "G" VOLVO B10M Plaxton 3500 49R/Toilet
1990 "G" DAF SB3000 Plaxton 3500 51R/Toilet
1989 "G" BOVA Futura 51R/Toilet
1989 "G" SCANIA K113 Van Hool Alizee SH 49R/Toilet
1989 "F" DAF SB2300 DHTD Duple 320 51R/Toilet
1989 "PP" BOVA Futura 49R/Toilet
1989 "F" DAF SB2300 Van Hool Alizee DH 51R/Toilet
1989 "F" VOLVO B10M Plaxton 3500 53R
1989 "F" DAF SB3000 Van Hool Alizee 49R/Toilet
1989 "F" VOLVO B10M Van Hool Alizee H 53R
1989 "F" DAF SB3000 Plaxton 3500 51R/Toilet

1988 "F" DAF SB3000 Van Hool Alizee SH 49R/Toilet
1988 "E" VOLVO B10M Plaxton 3500 49R/Toilet
1988 "PP" LAG Panoramic 49R/Toilet
1988 "PP" BOVA Futura 49R/Toilet
1988 "PP" DAF SB3000 Van Hool Alizee DH 51R/Toilet
1987 "PP" DAF SB2300 Plaxton 3500 53R Air Conditioning
1987 "D" DAF SB2300 Van Hool Alizee "H" 49R/Toilet
1987 "D" DAF SB2300 Plaxton 3500 49R/Toilet
1987 "D" T815 Van Hool Alizee 51R/Toilet

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1996 "N" DAF SB3000WS Plaxton 350 53R
1996 "N" DAF SB3000WD Van Hool Alizee "H" 51R/Toilet
1996 "N" DAF SB3000WS Van Hool Alizee "H" 49R/Toilet/Air Conditioning
1996 "N" EOS 90 49R/Toilet/Air Conditioning
1995 "M" DAF SB3000WS Van Hool Alizee "DH" 51R/Toilet
1995 "M" EOS 90 49R/Toilet/Air Conditioning

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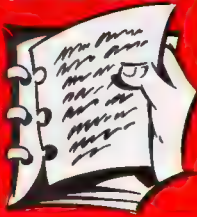
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1994 "L" EOS 90 49R/Toilet
1994 "L" DAF SB3000WS Van Hool Alizee "DH" 51R/Toilet
1994 "L" DAF SB3000WS Van Hool Alizee "H" 51R/Toilet
1994 "L" EOS 49R/Toilet/Air Conditioning
1994 "L" DAF MB230LT Van Hool Alizee "H" 51R/Toilet
1992 "J" DAF MB230LB Van Hool Alizee "H" 51R/Toilet
1992 "J" DAF SB3000 Auto Van Hool Alizee "H" 51R/Toilet
1992 "J" DAF SB3000 Van Hool Alizee "DH" 51R/Toilet
1990 "G" DAF 2300 DHTD Duple 320 57 seater
1990 "G" DAF SSB2300 DHS Van Hool Alizee DH 51R/Toilet
1989 "F" DAF SB3000 Van Hool Alizee SH 53R
1989 "F" DAF SB2300 Van Hool Alizee DH 53R
1989 "F" DAF SB2300 Van Hool Alizee SH 49R/Toilet
1989 "F" DAF MB230LT Plaxton 3500 51R/Toilet
1989 "F" DAF MB230LB Plaxton 3500 51R/Toilet
1988 "E" DAF MB230LT Plaxton 3500 53R/Toilet

DIARY



COACH AND BUS WEEK ENDING...

10 YEARS AGO

● **DAVID J Brown** buys Bedford's Dunstable plant together with rights to the manufacturer's bus and truck chassis. A new company, All Wheel Drive, is set up with Mr Brown chairman and Leyland Vehicles chairman Ron Hancock as md. Ron Whittle has doubts: "Even if Bedfords were still available, I would buy Javelins," he says.

● **DEREK Randall**, of Derek Randall Enterprises, is jailed for 12 months for fraud. He hid VAT due on a fleet of Jonckheere coaches, and stole the proceeds of the sale of two Rolls-Royces.

15 YEARS AGO

● **COACHMART'S** road tester takes the Wrights Contour coach for a spin. Jointly developed with Bedford, the aerodynamic vehicle has an incredibly 'clean' front end with back-swept screen. The test vehicle is built on Bedford YNT, and impresses the magazine with sub-£60,000 price tag.

● **ALSO tested**, the Neoplan Cityliner N116 gets top marks not only for its stunning looks and that charismatic V8 engine but for fuel economy of almost 13 mpg. At the time of testing, it has been going for 11 years, and is already being labelled an 'evergreen'...

● **THE five Volvo B58s** in Stagecoach's express coach fleet are reported to have covered a million miles between them in their first year in service. The Duple Dominant IIs are double-glazed with tol-let.

BYGONE DAYS

Vehicle has transport historians outfoxed

OUR request for more information about the Barton attempt at lowfloor technology in the Twenties (CBW, 30 October) drew little response from the column's devotees.

Roy Marshall, who supplied the excellent photo copied from a now-lost original, really had his fellow transport historians out-foxed with this vehicle. Hardly surprising, since the picture hadn't seen the light of day for 70 years.

We threw out a special challenge to Charles S Marshall, a County Durham reader who criticised a previous picture competition for not being challenging enough.

This time, he says the following:

"I certainly did not have in mind anything like the ugly and unlikely specimen you featured in *Coach and Bus Week*, 30 October. This illustration is, of course, not one of a true vehicle, but a montage. That it is such a creation is particularly evident where the front

screen top rail (if there were a screen) meets the front of the offside cant rail," he says.

Not true. The picture is not doctored in any way. The front screen top rail you mention is a wooden strip, bowed around the front and screwed to the cant rail. It's an optical illusion that it doesn't seem to meet the cant rail.

"Nostalgia is mainly about using our memories selectively to remember the good things of the past, and I had hoped that you might use this part of your journal to reflect on the past glories of UK coach and bus manufacturing at its zenith, when vehicles entirely of British manufacture were exported to almost every part of the globe," says Mr Charles Marshall. Point taken.

The final word goes to Roy Marshall who, in trawling through his photo collection, has managed to shed more light on the mystery vehicle with the accompanying picture. It shows the two



Model T engines at the front of the bus.

"Designed for one driver, how did he work six foot controls with two feet?" Mr Marshall asks, adding that he has to assume the pairs of pedals were linked.

"His hands would have been no use to him; they had plenty to do from the evidence of what is visible," says Mr Marshall.



So is this really just the ticket?

ELDERLY people in Strathclyde are getting a better deal from their bus fares now that FirstBus subsidiary Strathclyde Buses has issued a new multi-journey pass.

The £7, 20-journey ticket comes after a survey of pensioners in Glasgow, who almost universally said they were sick of fumbling with change every time they made their trip down the Post Office or betting shop.

Though these three seem very happy with the ticket, we can't help thinking FirstBus could have made it small enough for a single pensioner to carry...

Here's to the next 85 years of trading

CONGRATULATIONS in advance to T. Norbury on its forthcoming 85th anniversary.

The destination blind maker which has traded through two world wars set up as a cotton converter in Manchester before dreaming up the idea of equipping tramcars and early buses with a multi-destination screen.

To achieve this was no small feat, and it was the same pioneering com-

pany which came up with the idea of adapting the ancient Chinese art of screen printing into a mass-production technique. Since then, it has been used to produce everything from banners to tee shirts.

The original artwork for Norbury designs was done with pen and ink, though these days, computers rule the pre-printing roost. It should be mentioned that computer circuit boards are

made using screen printing. The resultant designs are then translated into artwork before being translated into 'silk' screens: "At heart, we are still screen printers," said Mike Norbury, md.

Norbury hasn't let the grass grow under its feet in any way, even having its own Web site for its international clientele, and launching its own non-fade fluorescent yellow, StayBrite. Here's to the next 85 years...

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor, *Coach and Bus Week*, EMAP Automotive Ltd, Wentworth House, Wentworth Street, Peterborough PE1 1DS
fax: 01733 467154 e-mail: FrankF@automotive.emap.co.uk

Why not start a campaign?

In his letter (CBW, 30 October) MJ Russell sets out very clearly the operational advantages of two-person-operated urban buses. With my engineering background, I see the main advantage is that you can use buses designed the way God intended them to be - with the engine at the front, and the door at the back. This means that buses can be much simpler, lighter, cheaper, and far more reliable.

Our industry was built up on vehicles like the AEC Regent, the Leyland Titan (TD and PD), or Bedford and Ford coaches, all of them very similar to the trucks of the day apart from the chassis frame and the back axle. Even low floor was not a problem - did the Lodekka FLF of the early sixties not have a lower and flatter floor than even the Super Pointer Dart?

In my time, I have produced hundreds of designs for equipment far simpler, lighter, cheaper, and better in every way than current products but there was just one snag - the one referred to in Mr Russell's letter: the need to "pay wages on a scale that improved staff retention at a time of general shortage." It seems the industry is currently having great difficulty in attracting enough staff of the right calibre to operate services with crews of one person, never mind two.

The answer is not to beat about the good old days. As equipment designers and suppliers, we must produce equipment which will try to give the many advantages of crew operation, but which will work in practice in the conditions of the next millennium.

You actually gave the answer to many of the problems of OPO, in your major article on Smartcards published the previous week. Smartcards do give significant advantages to the regular traveller, but people can get into the habit of carrying a large stock of coins at all times, so they always have the correct fare ready. Drivers get pretty slick at checking the coins.

The massive benefit comes to irregular travellers. They simply tell the driver where they want to go, and hold their card by the machine, which deducts the correct fare from the value stored on the card. There is no fiddling with coins, or giving a

Letter of the Week

Back-door road to standardisation

LIKE many others I feel that the outside-lane ban on UK motorways is dangerous and its implications regarding safety totally ignored by the authorities. I believe that it was merely a sly way to bring this country into line with the rest of Europe.

In all other European countries coaches are restricted to lower speeds than our previous 70mph limit and banned from using the outer lane of three or more laned motorway standard roads.

I believe the ban is no more than a back-door route to bring us into line with European policy, possibly originating from pressure on our Government from our EU partners but to which we have not been made privy, or to bring our roads policy into line with other member states without "upsetting the locals too much."

We all have experienced the cottage industry feeling of coach tourism operation. Often the manner we are

treated by those in power or of authority is almost like smacking our hands and telling us not to be naughty children, or to do as our authoritarian elders tell us without question. To me this ruling smacks of the same condescending attitude: "Don't tell our coach industry children the truth, give them a story which sounds feasible, they'll believe us."

At the end of the trial period figures will be produced to prove that the ban and speed reduction is good for all and has beneficial effects on other parts of the community, too, far too beneficial to allow us to return to outside lanes and 70 mph.

Take my word for it, the ban is here to stay but perhaps you are all aware of this and that is why you all seem so complacent about it.

RAY PEARSON
Cottingham
East Yorkshire

£1 coin for an 80p fare.

These schemes are not science fiction. We have been running such schemes for several years, on actual buses in revenue-earning service.

We are now moving on, and developing the contactless Citycard, which is read in 100 milliseconds, and eliminates the need to issue a ticket. The fundamental point of these schemes, from the point of view of the irregular traveller, is that the same card is used on buses, in car park machines, and elsewhere.

That means that, if I suddenly decide, 'in a moment of foolishness', to go by bus, I simply use the Smartcard which I have already bought for the car park machines. I do not have to rush out and buy a special card, knowing that I will be left with £9.20 worth of Smartcard which will be useless if the bus journey turns out to be a disaster. This means that people can try a bus trip, without any of the embarrassment so clearly explained by Mr Russell, but also without the financial commitment of buying a ticket, smart or otherwise, valid only on buses.

With these advantages, it is no surprise that the industry is showing massive interest in Smartcards, and that many leading operators believe Smartcards will give them a significant increase in revenue. Our next scheme will go live, in Hemel Hempstead, within a few weeks.

DAVID G RENNARD
Transmo Ltd
Royston
Herts

In defence of the lowfloor

As always, your articles prove to be provocative and I could not resist replying to the letter (CBW, 13 November) regarding low-floored vehicles.

Mainline Group took the decision in the back end of 1995 to re-launch one of its popular services by introducing low-floored Wright-Bodied B6Ms. From that date the service has received unsolicited testimonials from various quarters, including wheelchair users.

The vehicles have been welcomed, NOT only by the customer, but also the drivers, who were hand-picked and trained to give that little bit of extra customer care there by negating the problems associated with physically-challenged groups.

Patronage rose (and is still rising) and complaints dropped, both primary aims in our constant battle with other modes of public transport. My personal response to Howard Jackson is quite simple: "Come to Sheffield and see low-floored buses in action."

Better still, I have enclosed a press cutting from one lady who tells the papers that the services have given a whole new meaning to travel for her.

Not only has she saved money, but she is now free to shop and see relatives, thanks to the implementation of low-floored buses, and in

spite of being a wheelchair user.
ROBERT ADLINGTON
Unit manager
Mainline Group
South Yorkshire

It was lowfloor

In my letter published in *Diary* (CBW, 16 October) there were two errors; one being quite important. The Leyland trolleybus WAS low floor and the Gilford was on display at OLYMPIA. I am sure your readership includes quite a number of people, like myself, with a considerable interest and knowledge of the industry, or certain sectors of it. Therefore, it is difficult for you to find some photos that no one will recognise.

ROY MARSHALL
Burnley
Lancs

Letter of the Week wins a
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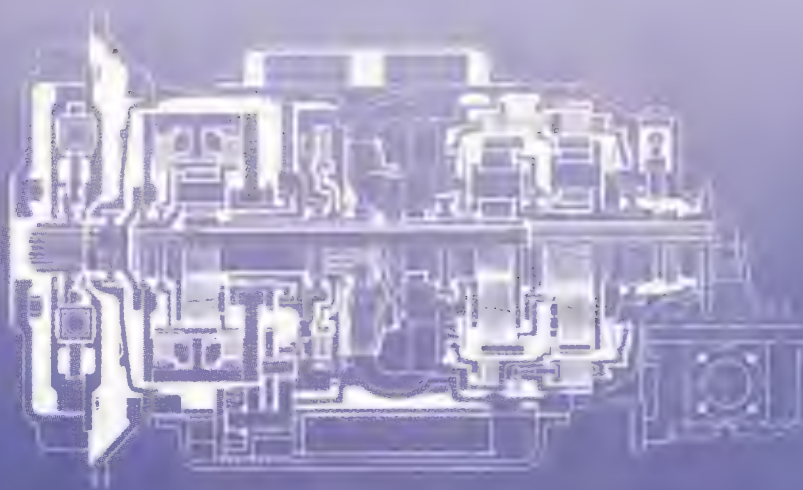
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Optare Solera



SOLERA: A NEW ERA?



Optare headed for Spain to test a coach of style and quality that fills a small but significant

niche in the market for a cost-effective 35 seater. The Optare Solera was unveiled at Coach & Bus 97, but Mike Morgan was able to put the first one through its paces on the CBW circuit

WHEN Optare unveiled its stylish 35-seat Solera at the Coach & Bus 97 show its launch was backed by orders for over 20. The £90,000 niche-carving midicoach bodied by Ferqui of Spain will be making its debut in the fleets of British operators Eddie Brown of London and Coach Companions before Christmas.

Like many of the new vehicles on display at the NEC, it reflects the changing face of the British coach and bus industry. It is among the increasing number of Spanish-built coaches spearheading a revolution in buying trends among British operators and is built in a factory where flexible output and attention of individual customer needs are the watchwords. **▶▶**

▶▶▶ Although Euro Coach Builders of Donegal builds the similar but 33-seat Obradors designed EX33 on the same chassis/cowl in Ireland (CBW, 24 May), Solera is the first PSV in the UK on 11-tonne Mercedes-Benz 01120L. For coach application it has upgraded front axle and rear air-suspension. A front-mounted six-cylinder 211bhp Merc engine provides the power and it drives through a positive 'short-throw' six-speed manual gearbox. To find out how this newcomer performs the prototype was put through its paces on the demanding full-blown CBW road test circuit.

As with any prototype, there should be a note of caution before drawing any conclusions and, as the first to land on these shores, it was built to a right-hand-drive translation of a European standard. Yet, despite the short period since its public debut, Optare Coach Sales and Ferqui have worked on a series of modifications in response to the differences between the needs of the Spanish and UK markets.

Optare Coach Sales manager, Chris Gee, told CBW that a series of specification changes not only recognised personal preferences in this country but also acknowledged UK interpretation of construction and use regulations.

Greater use of soft trim on the interior sidewalls will be available as will a range of decorative window cappings. Skirt height on the vehicle is to be lower, bringing the opportunity to reduce the first entrance step height by around 100mm and the step well is to have deeper treads. In addition, the side lockers will have a lower floor, adding further capacity to the total of 4.5 cubic metres available.

The plug door will be modified from forward-opening to rearward-opening and a pavement window incorporated to aid driver vision. A peage window in the door is an option.

BUILD

Optare claims the Solera fills a gap in the market currently unfilled by any competitor and has acquired the sole distribution rights for the UK, Eire and Channel Islands for this purpose-built product from Carrocerias Ferqui SL of Nareña, Asturias, Spain. A family-owned business with more than 40 years experience serving the passenger transport industry. Ferqui builds a range of vehicles from the Ford Transit-based Bambino, as supplied to Titan Tours of London, to full-size executive models at its modern factory which employs 60 people. The company delivers around 150 vehicles a year based on chassis from, in the main, Ford, Mercedes-Benz, MAN and Iveco.

The coach sells not only in its home country but in Germany, France and Holland, having been exhibited at European shows since 1995. Solera, a name reserved for the UK, was selected because, in Spanish, it is associated with a Brandy of maturity and high quality. Mr Gee, explained the link between name and product. He said: "After an extensive search across Europe we believe the Solera, produced by Ferqui to our specifications, represents the best blend of quality and value for money and are certain that it will appeal to those operators who require a vehicle with about 35 seats and which delivers high levels of comfort and reliability together with good luggage accommodation at a realistic price."

Galvanised steel tubes used in the R66 rollover-tested body frame are epoxy coated. After panelling with galvanised stretched steel at waist level or GRP front/rear, and fitted with aluminium locker doors, the frame is wax injected. Under-



Solera fills a gap in the market between the Mercedes-Benz 0814-based midi and the short full-size



High first step will be lower



Full-width body is able to accommodate up to



coach such as the 10-metre Bova Futura



5 passengers and provides generous legroom



Headroom is reduced at the rear

seal is applied after the vehicle is fully assembled and painted with two-pack acrylic.

All lockers are cantilevered except below the emergency door and the luggage area soft-trimmed. Substantial cross-members divide the rear boot but these should not be a disadvantage because luggage loaded at the rear is effectively separated from that loaded from either side. Single tinted direct glazing is standard and double-glazing is an option to be offered at a later date.

Mr Gee says six Soleras are currently in-build at the Fergui factory in Northern Spain and a total of 20 will be in operation on British roads by the end of May 1998 as Optare gears-up to supplying around 30 in the first 12 months.

PASSENGER IMPRESSIONS

The 9.2-metre long, 2.5-metre wide Solera body is able to accommodate 35 passengers and a courier with generous legroom, but the position of the emergency door prevents the rear row of five seats from being moved forward sufficiently to allow them to recline. Consequently it is a 35 seater with 30 recliners. Options include rear saloon toilet and/or Continental steps and door which would reduce capacity to a maximum of 31.

Individual forced-air together with two roof hatches is standard ventilation. For an extra £5,000 Hispacold air-conditioning is an option built into the design.

The interior layout is akin to previous generations of forward-control coaches similar to the once ubiquitous Bedford SB. However, the bulk of the engine cover prohibits the once-favoured pair of front passenger seats alongside the driver. Instead, a single courier seat sits in splendid isolation, having been moved forward and inwards since the NEC show to take the occupant away from the thick 'B' pillar which carries much of the additional strength needed to meet R66. The advantage is that legroom in this area is very generous and operators have a platform twist courier and doorway where drinks machine and/or fridge could be fitted.

One difference from the conventional front-engined coach of yesteryear is that all seats are raised 110mm to produce a sunken gangway on the inside and better luggage compartment on the underside. Headroom is generous until a first step in front of the penultimate row of seats takes it down to six feet precisely. Then there's another step where the rear boot gets bigger and the rear header box is enlarged to take the optional air-conditioning unit. To access the rear seats without colliding with the padded header is indeed good fortune.

DRIVER IMPRESSIONS

Keeping your head down is also advisable no matter which of the variety of approaches is selected to get behind the steering wheel. Whether it's through the electric window equipped driver's door, over the engine and gear lever, or from behind the seat - all represent an obstacle course, though there is adequate space to enter the cab from behind the Isringhausen driver's seat (air suspension unit on the test coach) because the 2.5-metre body gives a useful gap on the offside. Headroom is limited by the full-length rack which incorporates the added convenience of a locker for personal effects and, where fitted, video player (the front header box incorporates brackets for the monitor). ▶▶▶

ROADTEST

Despite the obvious coachbuilt feel to the whole coach, it is difficult to disguise the truck-like origins of the 01120 chassis/cowl. The large hump between driver and co-driver gives the game away - as does the short-throw gear lever and driving position which is higher than the passenger seats. Straight from a standard Mercedes-Benz cab, the dash has no convenient slot for radio/cassette, but does have the virtue of coming complete with central heater/demist controls and nearside 'glove compartment' requisitioned to house body and chassis electrics. However, the grey plastic used in this assembly is at odds in terms of material and design with the rest of interior, which, on most surfaces uses a light grey hard trim relieved by moquette on the centre roof panel and on the underside of the racks.

The division between cab area and passenger saloon emphasises design compromises also recognised once seated behind the steering wheel.

A mix of steel and air suspension and the 2.28 metre track under a 2.5 metre body results in some sideways rocking motion on poor road surfaces, lacking the control of a full-air system yet in a higher division than the smaller 0814D. Nevertheless, it has to be said that the ride comfort is impressive and, for the most part quiet. Top decibel levels are inevitably at the front where the recorded 77 dB(A) contrasts with the 71/70 dB(A) in the passenger saloon.

Ferqui has gone over the top with some of the driver facilities. The interior mirror is so large that it doubles up as a driver vanity mirror and the blinds are impractical because, being designed for a full-size coach, are too big and pull-cord difficult to reach.

Of two other complaints from the drivers seat, Mercedes-Benz is responsible for the ridiculous position of the exhaust brake pedal under the front edge of the seat where it is impossible to get at, and Ferqui is responsible for the rear end indicator repeater lights positioned directly in line of vision with those of following cars.

PERFORMANCE

Because this right-hand drive prototype is 3.15 metres high compared with 3.3 metre bodywork sold on mainland Europe, its ECE R66 roll-over certification had yet to be ratified at the time of the test. Being an 11 tonne GVW coach it needed this qualification to exceed 60 mph, so the whole test, particularly on the M6/M1, was carried out at a speed which was more truck-like than coach-like. The difference between 62.4 mph (100 km/h) and 60 mph (97 km/h) added a full five minutes to the M-way section of the test and posed greater challenges when pulling out to overtake.

As you would expect, speed restraint, results in better fuel economy and a test high of almost 17mpg was achieved while the steady tach trace remained faithfully at the temporarily imposed limit. At 60 mph the engine is at the top end of the green band, suggesting that there would be a fuel penalty for higher speed cruising.

Certainly the test showed the effect of multiple gearchanges and regular use of the high revs in the region of 26 rpm on the edge of the red.

The cross-country route of the three-section road test pulls together a mixed bag of driving conditions. There's the hills around the borders of Leicestershire, Rutland and Northampton shire, including the effortless fourth-gear climb of 1 in 6 Rockingham Hill; acceleration tests on the flat approach to Rockingham; the town traffic of Stamford and Market Harborough; plus every type of road from harsh country lanes to A5. Throughout this two-and-a-half hour drive the tach needle was as restless as a bus load of school children at the end of term.

Fuel economy suffered by more than 2.5 mpg, whereas the trunk road romp on the final leg from Newport Pagnell across to the A1 and our return North brought the near-test average of around 15 mpg.

VERDICT

In standard form, the Optare Solera is priced at £89,975 and is being sold directly by both Optare CoachSales and Autobus. In addition three established Autobus dealers handle the product - Connaught PSV of Doncaster, Carriageways of Bedford and Mid West Bus and Coach Sales of Cheltenham.

Twelve months full parts and labour warranty is standard with additional Mercedes-Benz 12 months (200,000km) driveline cover. Optional Mercedes-Benz Powerguard extends driveline cover to five years.

Solera weighs in at under eight tonnes, carries 35 in Fainsa Gaudi luxury, delivers over 15mpg, has smooth-flow aerodynamics thanks to the flush direct-glazing, and the 'big-six' power plant pulls like a train from very low revs.

It's a formula that makes a very attractive small coach which fits neatly between the Optare Group's Mercedes-Benz 0814D-based Autobus Nouvelle at around £78,000 and the 10-metre Bova Futura at... well, nearly twice as much for 34 seats.

Initial sales point to a successful launch and Optare has sufficient product support in place to encourage others to follow in their foot steps. Yet the logic of its introduction, together with the evidence of this road test, begs a very simple question. Why has it not been seen before?

SPECIFICATION

CHASSIS:	Mercedes-Benz 0.1120L
BODY:	Optare Solera - 35 seats
PRICE:	£89,975
ENGINE:	Mercedes-Benz six-cylinder turbo/intercooled OM366LA
POWER:	211 bhp (157 kW) @ 2,600 rpm
TORQUE:	553 lb/ft (740 Nm) @ 1,400-1,600 rpm
CAPACITY:	5.958 litre
GEARBOX:	Mercedes-Benz six-speed G4/65 - 6/9.0 syncromesh
STEERING:	Mercedes-Benz power assisted
BRAKES:	dual-circuit air system together with exhaust brake drums front and rear handbrake - spring-release type
SUSPENSION:	front - parabolic springs with shock absorbers rear - air suspension with shock absorbers
FRONT AXLE:	rigid stub axle VL 2/11 D - 4.4 tonne
REAR AXLE:	rigid axle HL 4.35 D-7.6 tonne ratio - 3.83:1
TYRES:	265/70R x 19.5

DIMENSIONS

Length:	9.2 metres
Width:	2.5 metres
Height:	3.15 metres
Wheelbase:	4.0 metres
Unladen weight:	7,700 kg
GVW:	11,000 kg

PERFORMANCE

Test consumption:	CBW overall economy - 15.4 mpg Trunk road section - 14.9 mpg Motorway section - 16.95 mpg Cross-country - 14.36 mpg
Acceleration:	0-30 mph - 10 sec 0-50 mph - 25 secs
Noise levels at 62.5 mph:	front - 77 dB(A) middle - 71 dB(A) rear - 70 dB(A)



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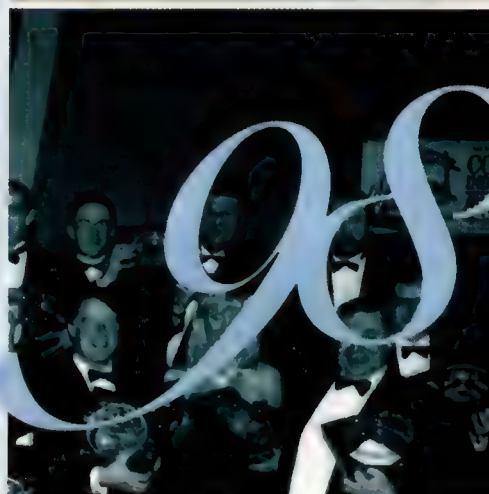
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Looks, and service...

AW GROUP

CAVALIER Travel Services of West Molesey in Surrey picked this Beulas EuroRider from the available vehicles for its looks - and for the AW Group service.

The six-vehicle operator specialises in the narrow niche of Government and embassies, using a highly-skilled team of five drivers, so image was important: "And it was my first big coach for a very long time, so I wanted to choose carefully," said partner Andy Pagan.

The 49 seater has all the usual Iveco Bus refinements, including air conditioning and toilet, video and water boiler. More importantly, the clean lines are a hit with its clientele, including trainee Blue Badge guides.

"That's another of our specialities," said Mr Pagan. "We provide all the coaching

for Blue Badge training. We also do some incoming tourism business, but the strength of the pound has meant this has had less significance recently."

Cavalier did, however, take a group of Cameroons tourists to Wembley in recent weeks - namely the national soccer team on their England friendly. Before that it was Moldova.

"That football business came with one of our drivers, who was tracked down by organisers for his skills," said Mr Pagan. "I try to pay our team as much as the work can afford, because I really can't fault them."

The same goes for the EuroRider, said Mr Pagan, which had its very minor teething troubles solved straight away by AW Group, and is now turning in good fuel economy and smooth service.



Boost for Independent

PLAXTON

LEEDS-based Independent Coachways has boosted its tour fleet with the purchase of a 53-seat Plaxton-bodied Volvo B10M. The company reached a major milestone last February in its 30-year history by becoming an all-Plaxton fleet, with Volvo coaches and Scania buses.

The company, which has been part of the Thornes Motor Services Group for nearly 10 years, withdrew and sold its last two Bristol RE single deckers and Leyland National 2, with its contracts being maintained by seven Plaxton Derwent-bodied Scania K112s.

The Volvo/Plaxton coach fleet strength stands at six.

Independent's manager Barry Rennison said the company had increased its touring commitment with some hotel-based contracts, hence an additional coach was needed.

Independent started operations with a Burlingham-bodied AEC Reliance coach, and adopted a policy of rebuilding Leyland coach chassis, which were then sent for rebodding, during the 1970s.

Mr Rennison boasts that, in its entire history, the fleet has never owned any coaches with overseas bodywork.





Kinch Beavers on

THRIVING Leicestershire operator Kinchbus has replaced six of its original Plaxton Beavers with these longer, Beaver 2s.

The new vehicles increase seating capacity per vehicle from 27 seats to 31, but the benefits go further than

PLAXTON

that, says Wayne Kinch.

"The latest examples, on air-suspension Mercedes-Benz Vario chassis, have a lower entry step, wider door and more room inside - all of which has made them popular with customers," said Mr Kinch.

Not that the Kinch family hasn't always had a liking for the robust coachbuilt Beaver. All new minibuses for the fleet since 1994 have been Beavers, and Kinchbus has chosen Pointer buses for some of its Loughborough town services.

The new Beavers have gone on to two routes in the town - one an established route taken over in 1994, and the other a route launched in 1995. They join a fleet of 51 vehicles.

IN BRIEF



Robin Hood is Dartline choice

DARTLINE COACHES of Sowton in Exeter went to Robin Hood Vehicle Industries for this stylish RH2000 25 seater. The Mercedes-Benz Vario-based midicoach carries Sutrak climate control air conditioning, video, water boiler and plug door among extras.



Lewis chooses Indcar ECO-3

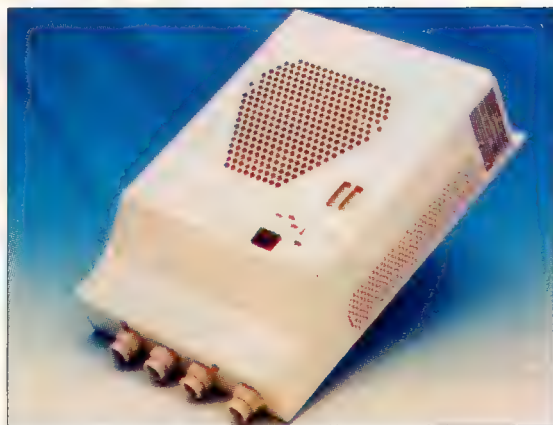
LEWIS TAXIS of Coventry plumped for one of AW Group's Indcar ECO-3s when it needed a 35-seat executive midicoach. The stylish, front-engined coach is based on Iveco EuroMidi chassis.



Crusading for a young fleet with £3.5 million

CMT BUSES of Liverpool has added 10 Volvo B10L-based Wrights Crusaders to its delivery of 12 Dart SLFs (left), bringing its vehicle investment to £3.5 million this year.

The Aintree-based operator has now replaced 35 of its fleet of 60 vehicles with new ones and, by the end of 1999, will have an average fleet age of under three years per vehicle. All are also getting two-way radio.



'Sine' of the times: latest inverter beats the buzz

No-interference inverter

INTERFERENCE on on-board video, TV or communications equipment can be caused by the use of an inverter.

Ironically, scaling 24V DC into 240V AC current to run devices like microwaves is fine, but when used with more sensitive, 240V equipment, the usual square-wave inverter can cause interference. This may prevent users getting the full clarity of satellite communications equipment, and medical equipment.

Merlin says its TS1500 sine-wave inverter puts an end to all this. By 'smoothing' the AC current, it is more compatible with technical equipment designed for domestic mains supply, and the current is better regulated than generator output, so more appropriate for computers, for example.

TS1500 is much smaller than older-generation sine-

wave inverters, being about the size of a telephone directory and weighing 2 kg. It uses modern circuitry to provide a 90% efficiency, producing a continuous 500 Watts but being able to handle peaks of up to 1.5kW, such as starting loads for power tools or large radio transmitters.

It comes with an LED bar graph display for the driver to check on battery drain, and a protection circuit which disconnects the inverter immediately battery voltage drops too low - and before re-starting the vehicle becomes impossible.

The CE-approved TS1500, at £465 plus VAT, is one of a range of inverters supplied by Merlin, which also carries accessories such as high-output alternators.

■ For full details, contact Merlin Equipment on 01491 824333, fax 01491 824466

Service checks all areas of vehicle operation

FTA offering operators a maintenance audit

By Mark Williams

THE Freight Transport Association is offering coach and bus operators a complete maintenance audit which should keep them free of PG9s.

The FTA Vehicle Inspection Service examines every area of vehicle operation, from the systems in place in the workshop to the safety of vehicles themselves. It takes in record-keeping and health and safety issues, and can be extended to establish performance standards.

Despite the association's

name, it has extensive experience of the coach and bus market. Among its customers are London Transport Buses, Travel West Midlands, several Stagecoach and FirstBus subsidiaries, Ulsterbus, Truronian and express operator Stagecoach Bluebird.

The scope of any audit is determined in advance between operator and an FTA Manager, who will then begin the process of assessment and make recommendations. Analysis can be presented in graph form by computer.

Vehicle inspection is covered nationwide by 100 FTA engineers - who have specific PSV training and understand current Vehicle Inspectorate and MOT testing procedure. The results of these inspections help form the basis of the audit procedure.

FTA can also supply engineering training, tachograph analysis, CPC training, and offers free membership of its roadside breakdown service.

■ Full details and a copy of the FTA booklet *The First Stop for a Safer Service* are available from John Lennox on 01892 526171

Nat Ex crews train in life support

NATIONAL EXPRESS staff will be better equipped to deal with heart attacks and other accidents.

The express services operator has signed up Rentokil subsidiary Initial Health Personnel Service to train 1,700 drivers and hostesses in Basic Life Support.

Initial will supply a team of Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation instructors at NatEx interchanges such as Ply-

mouth and VCS to train operator's staff. The full range of emergency situations will be presented to them, with a special focus on resuscitation.

"During the course, our instructors will explain the basic methods of life support, and how to resuscitate babies, children and adults," said senior instructor Carmen McKenzie.

"I believe that training

our staff in these basic techniques will give us the opportunity to prove we offer a better service to our customers," said a NatEx spokesman. Similar training has been given to holiday operator Thompson, P&O European Ferries staff, and many schools and colleges.

■ Details of courses are available from Carmen McKenzie, on local-rate number 0345 232425

Jon-Paul flushed with success

WHO said that coach toilets and fine cuisine don't mix? Not Jon-Paul Jackson, of Jackson's Coaches of Blackpool (right), who collected a fine-foods hamper from Elsan area sales manager Bob Thompson (left) after Coach and Bus 97. The prize was part of Elsan's sales drive at the big show, which showed how Elsan's CoachKem flush additive which not only spells disaster for germs and smells, but helps operators comply with health and safety regulations which have outlawed older flush additives.

The other major advantage of CoachKem is that it comes in single-dose, water-soluble sachets, so avoiding anyone handling the chemicals. Other chemicals just aren't as good, says Elsan, whose range is specified for use on Concord, Boeing and Airbus aircraft.

■ Elsan can be contacted on 01825 748200, fax 01825 761212



True Blue: Grub up at Jackson's

Paint is perfect match

PUTTING the final touch to East Lancashire's last-ever open-platform decker proved a job for specialist paint supplier H Marcel Guest.

The restoration reached a hiatus when East Lancs tried to match the original colours before presenting the vehicle to Great Manchester Museum of Transport. They called in HMG to help out.

"All we had were some samples of paint from old tins," said HMG's sales director Jim Webster. "From these, we were able to provide an exact match of red for the No 16 and of orange for No 71, for East Lancs to use."

■ H Marcel Guest is on 0161 205 7631



Spot on: HMG paint



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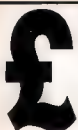
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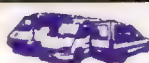
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1996 (N) SCANIA K113TRB - IRIZAR CENTURY, 49/51 reclining seats, air conditioned, Blaupunkt audio equipment, twin monitors, Webasto heating system, seat back tables, blinds and curtains, hot and cold drinks facilities, centre WC.....£139,500 + VAT

1994 (M) DENNIS JAVELIN - PLAXTON PREMIERE 320, 57 seater with belts, radio/PA, excellent condition REDUCED TO SELL ONLY £79,500 Yes £79,500 + VAT.

1993 (K) EOS 200 - MAN ENGINE, 48/52 reclining seats, Blaupunkt radio equipment, twin monitors, Webasto heating system, blinds and curtains, centre wc, (this is an EOS 200 not 100 model), hot and cold drink facilities.....£99,500 + VAT

1989 (G) LAG PANORAMIC - (DAF POWERED), 49/53 reclining seats, air conditioned, Blaupunkt audio equipment, twin monitors, Webasto, blinds and curtains, centre WC, hot and cold drinks facilities.....£49,500 + VAT

1991 (J) DENNIS DART CARLYLE BUS 10 metre, 40 seater, 20 standees.....£35,000 + VAT

All the above vehicles have been owned by us since new. All in excellent condition, all with current MoTs

Also 1980 (PP) VOLVO B58 - PLAXTON, 12 MTR SUPREME, 53 reclining seats, courier seat, power door.....£8,000 + VAT

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46 seats, toilet, servery, overhead lockers. ZF S685 Manual Gearbox. ABS, 3-piece windscreen, destination. CHOICE OF 3
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21 Seat GL

MOT October '98

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All MoT'd

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25 seater, Northern Counties body, coach built front, new upholstery 12 months, 4 litre Perkins engine, automatic gearbox, front disc brakes, 12 months test, nice drive, ready for work.

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Plaxton Paramount 3200, 1984, 49 reclining seats, 12 months MoT, 6 new tyres fitted, good condition
£10,500 ono

Part exchange considered

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A reg Duple Laser Coach, 51 recliners, 6 months MoT, seat belts, semi-automatic gearbox.

In daily use

£15,000 ono

Call Steve or Paul

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1989 G 609 SERVICE BUS. Reeve Burgess. 20 seats + 5, 709 back axle, MoT 5/5/98. Long tax, £9,500 ono + VAT

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4 NEW BUS SLF. Coming in this month

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59 seats with belts plus standees, double glazed, re-sprayed, owned from new, excellent condition, ideal commuter service vehicle, MoT June 1998 and September 1998
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BOVA FUTURA 1991/2

51 seats, exec toilet, drinks, TV, video, fridge, carpets, seat belts, bunk, excellent condition, all white, available with Winter '97 work.

First to see will buy

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49 seat, exec, toilet, drinks, TV x 2, video, carpets, seat belts, bunk, webasto, repaint all in white.

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20 seats

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2/1 seating, MoT 2/98

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51S full exec., taxed & tested May 1998, very good condition, seat belts fitted.

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Fully fitted with seat belts, demountable toilet, full draw curtains, 49/55 seats, 12 months MoT, 1 owner from new, good condition

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July 1992

VOLVO B10M Plaxton Premiere

★ 46 seats, toilet, servery, overhead lockers

★ ZF fully automatic gearbox, integral retarder, ABS, 3-piece windscreen, digital destination

£89,950 ono

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Duple Dominant II, 53 seats, Express doors, MoT March 1998. Good mechanical condition.

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51 recliner seats with toilet, H&C water, fridge, Telma, MoT May '98.

£62,500 ono

1989

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Berkhof Espirite 53 recliners, power door, owned by us since new, full service history, test July '98

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VIEWMASTER**

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72194/CM

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PARAMOUNT 3500, 53 recliners & courier, double glazed, Telma, webasto, curtains. **£62,000 + VAT**
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1988 Mercedes 811 Turbo 19-seater (15 reclining, 4 fixed) + courier seat. All with belts.

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£16,500 + VAT ovno

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Fully fitted with seatbelts, radio/cassette/PA, full draw curtains, 53 seats plus courier, MoT to May, tax to July, one owner from new, good condition.

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£55,000 ono
Quick Sale Required
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Mint condition.

Tested October 1998

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49/53 seater (demount toilet), seat belts, drinks machine, large monitor video etc.

All white livery. (Ex-Parks), tested 7/9/98, taxed 8/98, only 424,000 km.

Start haggling at £79,850 + VAT
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71 retrimmed seats with retractable belts, fitted with Cummins L10 engine, video and 6 monitors, radio/PA, toilet, boiler, fridge, bunk, MoT Feb '98
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New MoT, 11m, 49 seats and belts
£5,750+VAT

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51 recliners, toilet, video, boiler, new MoT
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48 recliners, toilet, boiler, video, new MoT
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74 seats, toilet, video, boiler, new MoT
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92 SCANIA K113CRB PLAXTON PREMIERE 350

GS772 gearbox, 49R+C, video/monitor, radio/PA/cassette, drinks machine, continental door, refrigerator, full seatbelts and centre sunken toilet.



86 LAG PANORAMIC

ZF 6 speed gearbox, 49R+C, retarder, radio/PA/cassette, drivers bunk, refrigerator, continental door, full seatbelts and central sunken toilet.



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OFFICE CONTACT

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ZF gearbox, 55R+C, video/monitor, radio/PA/cassette and full seat belts.



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51 reclining seats with seat belts, rear sunken toilet, drinks machine, continental door, good condition.

Choice of 2 available now

90PP test to Nov 98 £60,000

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PP, 49 reclining seats, Plain white exterior, maroon interior, carpets and curtains to match, wired for TV, Radio/PA systems.

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X REG DAF MB200 Supreme 5 GT, 53 reclining seats, MoT March 1998, tax end of January 1998, £10,950 + VAT. Gary Johnson, Cambridge. Tel: 01945 772477. 73668/DAF

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Year 1993 (K registration), right hand drive - UK specification, Cummins engine - 8CT 8.3, 157KW, ZF 6 speed manual gearbox, ABS brakes, exhaust brake, air suspension, autolube, Eberspacher saloon heater, air conditioning, speed limiter, tachograph, heated windscreens and drivers window, luggage racks and curtains, rear and side luggage lockers, mileage - between 30,000 to 50,000 miles, maintained by Dennis (service records available), fitted with 40 dual purpose seats, tilt tested for 48 seats and 22 standees, newly painted - 2 pack white. Ferry lift and kneeling suspension

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33,000, burgundy red

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Bova, full exec 49-53 seater, same price

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48 Ambiente reclining seats, c/w tray tables, Driver
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73842/KAS

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50 recliners, vgc,
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Per Vehicle (Including tyres)

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£3,250+Tyres/VAT
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Plaxton 3200

Cummins L10 Engine
Seat Belted
53 Recliner
Supplied with new MoT
£52,500 + VAT
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TIGER PLAXTON
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53 seats, manual gearbox,
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51 reclining seats with seat belts, mid
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position. Choice of 2 in good condition
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NEOPLAN SKYLINER

Air conditioned, 70 seatbelted recliners,
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2.5 DIESEL

8+ Driver
High backed seats with lap /
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Long and short wheelbase
25-33 seats, Allison gearbox,
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Possible finance available.
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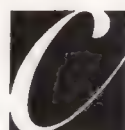
16 seater, fitted 3 point belts,
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£22,000
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MERCEDES 814 MILLENNIA COACH. 33 Hi-back coach seats covered in
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1987 D Freight Rover 350 Elme 16-seat coach, power door, repanelled coachbuilt body with large high-back seats, 3-point seat-belts, armrests, full soft trim interior with moquette to centre roof, twin luggage racks, large luggage boot, resprayed white, exceptional vehicle with spacious and comfortable passenger accommodation, one only, £4,295 READY NOW



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1987 D Freight Rover (Ford DI engine/MT75 box) Carlyle I 20-seat bus, £3,995

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1987 D MCW MetroRider 23/5-seat bus, Cummins engine, £6,495

1986 C Mercedes 608D/Reeve Burgess 20-seat bus, £5,495

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1987 E Iveco 49.10 Robin Hood 25-seat coach

THIS WEEK'S DRIVE-AWAY BARGAINS

(safety check only included, full preparation often available at extra cost if required)

1987 E Optare City Pacer 21/25 seat buses, just two owners from new, manual gearboxes, recent engine reconitions, yellow/black exteriors, outstanding appearance, MoT's 6/98 and 8/98, choice of two of these attractive vehicles at just £2,995 each

1983 A Mercedes 608D SMS 21-seat service bus, power door, MoT April, one only, £2,295

1982 Y Bova Europa I, 52 recliners, long MoT, recent engine recon, clean vehicle for age, bargain drive-away price of just £8,995



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R Iveco Ford 49-10 Turbo D, Super luxury 19 seater executive coach. Coach rear end with small boot. Super luxury M2, full sized coach seats with Fainsa luxury armrests. Glass coach plug door. Super luxury coach fittings and interior trim. **From £164 p week**

R Mercedes Benz Sprinter, Turbo D, Medium wheelbase, super luxury executive 12 seater mini coach. Superbly spacious. Full sized M2 luxury coach seats. Air conditioning. Side skirts. Timber cappings with luxury curtains. Drop step front entry. **From £115 p week**

R Iveco Ford 49-10 Turbo D, Pullman Executive. 16 seater with huge rear boot. Full executive trim and fittings. Full sized M2 seats with luxury arm rests. Walnut cappings and luxury curtains. TV / video, P.A. system, reading lights. Option for air conditioning. **From £180 p week**

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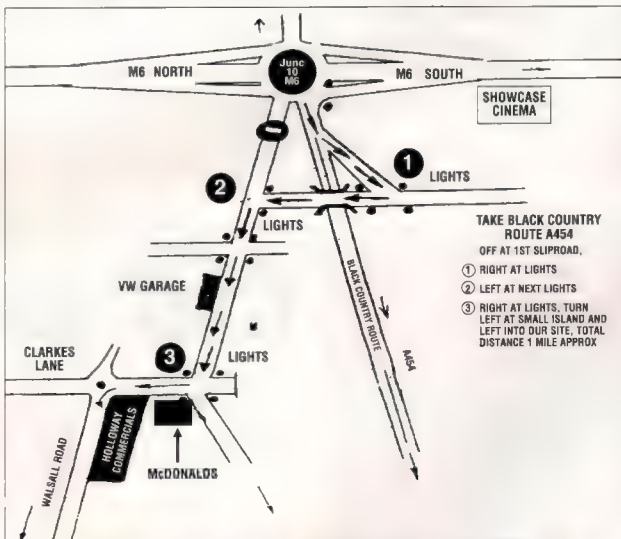


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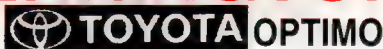
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AN68. 1979, M.C.W. bodywork, 84 seats. Test June '98.

A.E.C.

1979 PLAXTON SUPREME EXPRESS, 53 seats, manual gearbox. Test Feb '98.

BRISTOL

VRT, 1978. Low height E.C.W., 73 seats, Gardner engine.

L.H. 1977. 7.6" wide, E.C.W., 39 bus seats, semi-auto gearbox, power steering. Full Test.

MIDICOACH

1984 M.A.N. REEVES BURGESS RIVIERA. 28 coach seats with belts, power door, large boot, plain white. Test Dec.

1987 CAETANO OPTIMO, 19 seats + courier. Ready soon - ring for details.

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89 MERC 609, 19 seat coach.

88/89/90 TALBOT, triaxles, 22+ standees.

88 MERC, 19 coach seat, tested.

88 FROVER, 20 seats, Carlyle body.

88 MERC 814 29 coach seats.

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89 SANOS exec (Merc), 49 + toilet, TV

89 DAF, Algarve exec 11.6, toilet, TV

89 DUPLA 425 DAF, ZF 7 speed, 55 recliners.

88 B10 PLAXTON 3500, 49/TV.

86 B10 ALGARVE retrimmed 49/53 Exec

85 SETRA, exec, 49, toilet, TV

84 B10 VOLVO BERKHOF, executive, TV, retrimmed.

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1988 (August) BOVA FUTURA FHD/12/29 INTEGRAL, 49 reclining seats, courier seat, centre sunken toilet, continental door, exterior white.

1987 (Nov) LAG PANORAMIC, 49 reclining seats re-upholstered with Holdsworth Moquette, courier seat, fridge, continental door, centre sunken toilet, drinks machine, drivers crew compartment, exterior white. **Supplied with new MoT.**

1985 MAN SR280 HD INTEGRAL, 49 reclining seats, courier seat, continental door, toilet, wired for video. New MoT.

1985 LEYLAND TIGER 245 TL11, BERKHOF EVEREST, 49 reclining seats and courier seat, continental door, sunken toilet, wiring for video. **Special deal on this coach.**

71964/VSM

1984 VOLVO B10M LAG GALAXY, 49 reclining seats, courier seat. New MoT

1984 MAN SR 280, Low Line, 53 reclining seats, courier seat, double glazing, seat belts, MoT Dec '98..

1983 VOLVO B10M JONCKHEERE P90 Semi Decker, 57 seats, toilet, long MoT, dateless plate, exterior plain white. **Special deal on this coach..**

1982 LEYLAND LEOPARD ECW DUAL PURPOSE, 49 bus seats, MoT February 1998

1979 VOLVO B58 DUPLÉ DOMINANT, 53 seater, very clean interior, new MoT

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VOLVOS

1992 VOLVO B10M BERKHOF EXCELLENCE HL 2000, 50 recliners, courier, rear sunken kitchen and toilet, continental door, d/glazed, Telma, bunk, curtains, radio, PA/cassette/TV/video£87,500

1991 H VOLVO B10M PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3200 310 BHP INTERCOOLER, 53/57 reclining seats, ZF fully auto transmission, pannier lockers, double glazed, blinds, POD, radio/PA, belts£62,500

1989 F VOLVO B10M PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3200, low driver, 50 reclining seats, continental door, Sutrak air conditioning, Webasto, Telma, double glazing, pannier lockers, radio/PA, new test, choice£62,500

1989 F VOLVO B10M PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3500, 49 reclining seats, courier seat, centre demountable toilet/continental door, aircraft lockers, double glazing, Webasto, radio/PA.....£59,750

1988 PP VOLVO B9M PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3200, 41 reclining seats, radio/PA, absolutely mint condition.....£57,500

1988 F VOLVO B9M PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3200, 35/39 reclining seats, 2 tables, pannier lockers, radio/PA, retrimmed + repainted white, choice£57,500

1988 VOLVO B10M PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3500, 49/53 reclining seats, courier seat, centre demountable toilet/continental door, radio/PA£57,500

1988 E VOLVO B10M PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3200, 53 reclining seats, Telma, double glazing, radio, PA, new test.....£54,000

1986 C VOLVO B10M CAETANO ALGARVE, 53 reclining seats, courier, continental door, radio/PA, new test.....£32,500

1985 C VOLVO B9M PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3200, 43 retrimmed seats, repanelled and painted white, new test, choice£42,500

1984 PP VOLVO B10M JONCKHEERE 599, 49 retrimmed reclining seats, courier seat, rear sunken toilet/continental door, Telma, radio/PA£37,500

1983 PP VOLVO B10M VAN HOOL ALIZEE, 49 new retrimmed reclining seats, courier seat, centre sunken toilet/continental door, radio/PA.....£32,500

OTHERS

1991 H MAN 10-180 CAETANO ALGARVE, 32 reclining seats, courier, rear continental door, rear toilet, curtains, fridge, boiler, radio/PA, white.....£57,500

1989 F MERCEDES 609 REEVE BURGESS, 19 seat, deep boot, seatbelts£12,500

1989 LEYLAND SWIFT REEVE BURGESS HARRIER, 33 reclining Fainsa seats, courier seat, rack lighting, forced air, curtains, radio/PA, power door, rear locker.....£24,500

1989 F TOYOTA OPTIMO, 21 seater, engine totally overhauled recently, very good order, new test£11,500

1985 FORD TRANSIT DORMOBILE 16 SEATER BUS, 5 standing, new test£3,500

1984 BEDFORD NJM WADHAM STRINGER VANGUARD, Ratcliffe side lift, low mileage.....£2,500

1984 PP LEYLAND TIGER 245 PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3500, 49 retrimmed reclining seats, courier, rear sunken toilet/continental door, Telma, double glazing, air conditioning, radio/PA, recent recon engine and gearbox£27,500

1983 LEYLAND TIGER 245 PLAXTON PARAMOUNT 3200 EXPRESS, 53 reclining retrimmed seats, auto, radio/PA.....£15,500

1982 BEDFORD PJK 330 DUPLÉ DOMINANT, 29 retrimmed seats, POD, clean£4,000

DUE IN

1990 PP VOLVO B10M VAN HOOL ALIZEE, 49 recliners, courier, centre toilet, continental door, double glazed, Telma, bunk, fridge, boiler, blinds, TV and video£77,500

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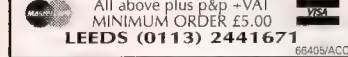
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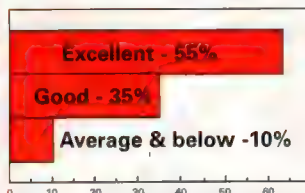
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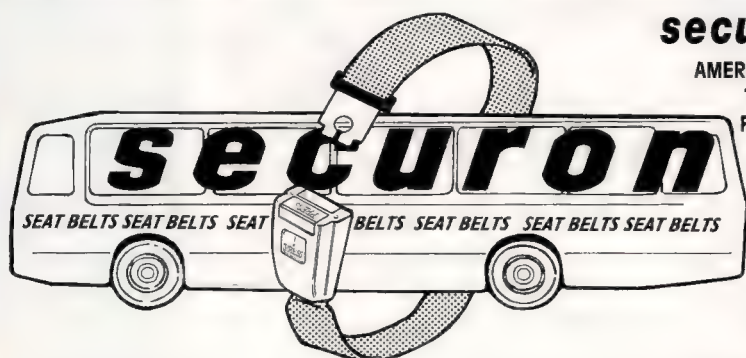
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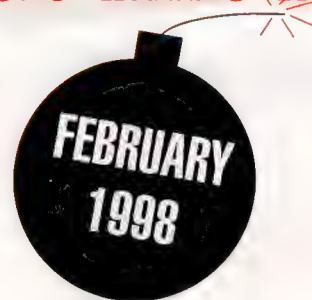
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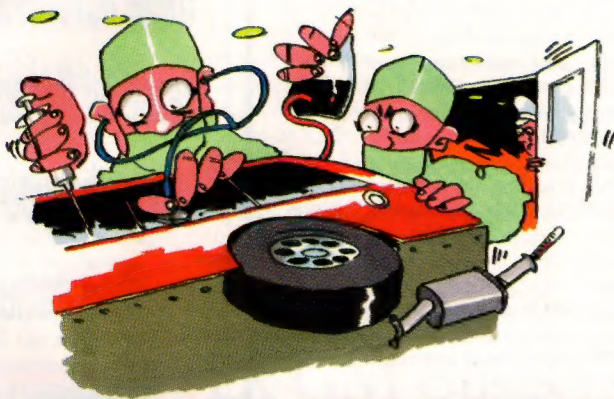
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We are looking for experienced and motivated personnel to join our Testing Team as part of a nationwide network of Station Managers. The role is pivotal to the management of VI's Business Performance (Testing) Team.

Your excellent communication skills will be complemented by your drive and determination to deliver a quality service. Ideally you will have well developed managerial and mentoring skills. Your experience of working with HGV and PSV's will be backed up by a technical qualification - BTEC/SCOTVEC in Motor Vehicle Engineering or City & Guilds Motor Vehicle Technician Part 2.

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- Day to day management of the Station, the Station Team and associated resources
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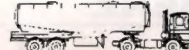
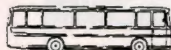
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The closing date for application is 12 December 1997

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73841/APP

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INVITATION TO TENDER FOR PROVISION OF TRANSPORT FOR THE HALLMEAD DAY SERVICE



Invitations are being extended to established transport operators to apply for permission to submit Tenders for conveyance of Users from various locations within the Borough to and from the Hallmead Day Centre, Anton Road, Sutton, Surrey.

It is anticipated that one vehicle with a seating capacity of 45 or 49 seats together with escort will be required to undertake the one morning and one evening round per day.

It is intended that the Contract will commence on 1st April 1998 and run for 3 years. The estimated annual value of the contract is £30,000.

Transport Operators holding a current "O" licence and wishing to submit a tender for this provision are invited to make written or telephoned requests for documentation to: Mr. N. Williams, Client Officer, Housing & Social Services Contracting, Housing & Social Services Department, 3rd Floor, Civic Offices, St Nicholas Way Sutton, Surrey SM1 1EA.
Tel: 0181 770 5710. Fax: 0181 770 5599.

The closing date for submission of Tenders will be Friday 12th December 1997.

73805/TEN



MONMOUTHSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

SELECT TENDER LIST - EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Tenders are invited for the supply and refurbishment of a double-decker playbus/mobile office. The work is to be completed by 1 April, 1998. All applicants will be required to complete a questionnaire supplying appropriate business and financial information. Contractors seeking inclusion on the select tender list must make an application in writing or by fax to the undersigned by Thursday, 4th December, 1997.

Mr A. Rex, Principal Officer,
Monmouthshire County Council, Social Services Department,
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73880/TEN

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Due to the continuing expansion and forthcoming reorganisation of our company we have the following vacancies:-

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We are looking for a self motivated person to join our management team to assist in the organisation and control of our 35 vehicle fleet. The successful candidate would preferably be a CPC holder, possess sound IT skills with proven organisation and leadership ability. The ideal person would be recently qualified; wishing to further their career, who is totally committed to the companies high standards of quality and service.

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73865/APP

Closing date: Friday, 5th December, 1997

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01733 467147

PEOPLE

FirstBus op appoints managers

FIRSTBUS subsidiary Bradford Traveller has appointed new commercial and marketing managers.

Richard Gledhill is promoted to commercial manager from his former post as schedules officer at Leeds City Link. His career started in 1979 at West Yorkshire PTE.

Brandon Jones is the company's new marketing officer, promoting Bradford Traveller's business locally. His role includes marketing the 19 lowfloor vehicles being delivered for town-centre use next year.

Solent Blue Line post

SOLENT BLUE LINE has appointed Steve Kelsey traffic manager.

Mr Kelsey, 48, is now responsible for 140 platform staff and 65 bus turnouts in SBL's network, from Winchester to the south coast. His career began as a conductor, before being one of only one per cent of applicants chosen for management training.



Steve Kelsey: 140 staff

Cowley on the road again for AW Group

A RETURN to coach dealing after 16 years with north east operator, OK Travel, puts Simon Cowley on the road again more than 30 years after he was first tempted into sales.

Mr Cowley, 52, became redundant last month when OK's coaching activity was rationalised by its parent, the Go Ahead Group. However, he was snapped-up by IvecoBus dealer, the AW Group of Ratby, which recognised the value of his long experience in the coach and bus industry.

Upon leaving school, Mr Cowley joined Northern General as a traffic assistant in his native north east. In 1966 he joined WS Yeates of Loughborough and was its rep for north east

England and Scotland until 1981, becoming OK's district manager on Tyneside. He subsequently served the company as reservations manager for the HighStyle coach holidays division.

Go Ahead has rebranded its north east activities with a new red and blue identity. Go OK Travel and Go HighStyle Holidays are the new names but, as the coaching requirements slimmed down from 34 to 16 vehicles, Mr Cowley's position became redundant.

Upon taking up his new job as AW Group's sales manager for the north east, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, Mr Cowley says the size of Iveco as a world player gives him confidence in the coaches it offers the UK market.



Simon Cowley: years of experience

Ex GM Buses man joins transport solicitors

FORMER GM Buses legal man Richard Tomkinson has joined Manchester transport solicitors Horwich Farrelly. Mr Tomkinson spent 12 years with the operator, and will now put his industry knowledge to good effect at Horwich Farrelly, establishing a new employment law section.

"Given the existing complexities of European employment legislation, the firm believes providers of all forms of public transport will need more specialist legal advice to deal with contractual, insurance and employment issues," said a spokesman. Mr Tomkinson's appointment as legal executive

will help establish this role.

"The public service industry is still in the throes of radical changes which began several years ago," said Horwich Farrelly partner David Kew. "Horwich Farrelly intends to be in a position to advise clients on the legal implications of the inevitable changes."

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